

Speech Acts in the History of English

EDITED BY

Andreas H. Jucker
Irma Taavitsainen



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Speech Acts in the History of English

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University of Zurich, English Department
Plattenstrasse 47, CH-8032 Zurich, Switzerland
e-mail: ahjucker@es.uzh.ch

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Andreas H. Jucker
University of Zurich

Irma Taavitsainen
University of Helsinki

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Preface

This book has been several years in the making. The need for further study on historical speech act analysis first became evident with the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* in 2000, and although individual case studies have been published, a collective volume on the topic has been wanting. We decided to remedy the situation and convene a seminar on diachronic speech act analysis at the ESSE-6 Conference of the European Society for the Study of English held in August/September 2006 in London. Earlier versions of most papers in this volume were presented there. All the papers deal with specific speech acts in the history of the English language, and they all employ corpus-based and empirical research methods. In the area of historical pragmatics, such an approach is inevitable as native speaker intuition and experimental methods, such as discourse completion tasks or role-plays, are not available to researchers.

This volume is organized into three parts. The first part is labeled “Directives and commissives” as it contains papers on speech acts such as requests and commands on the one hand, and promises on the other. These speech acts have an important feature in common in that they deal with future events. In directives, the speaker attempts to get the addressee to do something, and, in the case of commissives, the speaker commits himself or herself to doing something. The second part, under the heading “Expressives and assertives”, comprises papers on greetings, compliments and apologies, which share a concern not with actions to be carried out by the addressee or the speaker, but, in a fundamental sense, with expressing attitudes: attitudes of well-wishing, of approval and of regret.

All papers in this volume offer both descriptions of specific speech acts and discussions of methodological issues, including the problem of data retrieval. The third and last section of this volume, however, consists of three papers in which the technical aspects of retrieving specific speech acts from historical data takes center stage. These papers were not presented at the conference in London but took their inspiration from there and were added at a later stage. Earlier versions of two were presented at the Conference of the International Pragmatics Association in Gothenburg in July 2007. This conference had adopted the special topic “Language data, corpora, and computational pragmatics”: very fitting for these papers that explored the possibilities of extracting speech acts from large historical corpora.

All the papers in this volume underwent revisions and a lengthy reviewing process which started with very lively discussions at the two conferences, where contributors acted as respondents to one another. Revisions continued with the circulation of earlier

versions of papers. We hope that this process has helped to improve the coherency of the volume so that we can have a more solid basis for further explorations on the topic.

We would like to take the opportunity and thank the contributors for their cooperation and patience and for their willingness to revise their papers wherever we, or anonymous reviewers, felt this to be necessary. We would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers for the work they put into this volume by giving constructive criticism about earlier versions of the chapters. We gratefully acknowledge the funding of the Academy of Finland for Irma Taavitsainen's research in 2007 (project number 1118478). For our own chapters, we were fortunate to have the help of three doctoral students in collecting the corpus data for the apologies paper (initiated in 2004). Turo Hiltunen and Jukka Tyrkkö were working as research assistants at the time, funded by the Research Unit of Variation, Contacts and Change at the University of Helsinki. We would also like to thank Anu Lehto for collecting corpus data for the compliments paper. For help in editorial work and language checking, we thank Danielle Hickey, and we are grateful to Barb Breustedt for her invaluable assistance in the editorial work.

December 2007

Andreas H. Jucker Irma Taavitsainen

Speech acts now and then

Towards a pragmatic history of English

Irma Taavitsainen and Andreas H. Jucker

University of Helsinki and University of Zurich

We may climb a mountain with various types of equipment, and starting from any of its slopes, but we need be aware that they may be slippery and treacherous in various ways. And the history of language is a very difficult mountain to climb. (Bertuccelli Papi 2000: 64)

1. Introduction

Histories of the English language continue to be published in great numbers and recent years have seen an upsurge in such publications in the form of handbooks, scholarly treatises or introductory textbooks for students. However, in spite of the wealth of knowledge that we already have in large areas of the development of the English language from its earliest written records in the seventh century to the present day, equally large areas are still, more or less, unexplored. While we know much about the developments in the more traditional areas of phonology, morphology, lexicology, syntax and even semantics, we still know very little about the developments in pragmatic patterns of language use.

In the seven volumes of the *Cambridge History of the English Language* published in the 1990s, sociolinguistics and pragmatics are virtually non-existent. In more recent authoritative single-volume histories of English, such as Hogg and Denison (2006) and Mugglestone (2006), pragmatics is still not included. *The Handbook of the History of English* (van Kemenade and Los 2006) is a notable exception. It devotes one of its six parts (with three chapters) to pragmatics. Another exception is the book *Alternative Histories of English* (Watts and Trudgill 2002), which is explicitly devoted to lesser known varieties of English and to the communicative and pragmatic aspects of English. There are also some independent studies that deal with individual aspects of the history of English, several of which are devoted to pragmatics, for instance, Traugott and Dasher (2005) on grammaticalisation, Brinton (1996) on discourse markers, Watts, Ide and Ehlich (1992) on politeness and Arnovick (1999) on speech acts.

2. Previous research on the history of speech acts

The idea of tracing speech acts in historical contexts was discussed in the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* (2000), with the core issue raised by a polemical question: “Is a Diachronic Speech Act Theory Possible?” (Bertuccelli Papi 2000: 63). In fact, studies in this area had already been conducted. Back in the 1970s, Schlieben-Lange and Weydt discussed the historicity of speech acts (Schlieben-Lange 1976; Schlieben-Lange and Weydt 1979). Lebsanft (1988) provided a close analysis of greetings in Old French; in English, Arnovick’s article series on illocutionary histories of selected speech acts started in 1994/1995, and her monograph on the same topic came out in 1999. The inaugural issue of the *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* contained a host of diachronic speech act studies including Schrott (2000) on questions in Spanish, Culpeper and Semino (2000) on speech acts related to witch hunts in Early Modern England, and Jucker and Taavitsainen on insults in the history of English (2000).¹ Within the past seven years, historical pragmatics has become an established field in historical linguistic study and the number of diachronic speech act studies has grown considerably, even to the extent that it has become of equal importance as (or at least a rival to) the study of linguistic processes (see below). Recent studies include Jucker (2000); Kohnen (2000a, 2000b, 2002, 2004a, 2004b, 2007); Alonso Almeida and Cabrera-Abreu (2002); Busse (2002); Pakkala-Weckström (2002); Milfull (2004); Archer (2005); Grzega (2005); and Taavitsainen and Jucker (2007). This volume represents a new stage of diachronic speech act research, but there are, of course, still many gaps, and the long lines of diachronic development are only just emerging.

Considering the fundamental importance of speech act values, the dearth of knowledge is even more surprising. While we know a lot about the development of sounds and sound patterns, and the structure of words, phrases and sentences, we still know very little about how speakers used words and sentences to communicate. Did earlier speakers of English use the same repertoire of speech acts that we use today? Did they use them in the same way? How did they signal speech act values and how did they negotiate them in cases of uncertainty?

We feel that speech act analysis could serve as a ground-breaker towards a pragmatic history of the English language, although we only have flashes of past practices and a more detailed and comprehensive picture is not yet possible. In the quotation cited at the beginning of this chapter, Bertuccelli Papi uses the analogy of a mountain that can be climbed from various points of departure and with various types of equipment. In the same way, on our quest for a pragmatic history of English through diachronic speech act analysis, we are on the largely uncharted slope of the pragmatic side of the mountain.

1. The notion of pragmatic space was introduced in this article (Jucker and Taavitsainen 2000: 74-76), see below.

Researchers can take different starting points when they investigate the history of individual speech acts or individual classes of speech acts and they can use different tools, but they always have to be aware of the slippery and treacherous nature of their endeavour.

3. Key issues in historical linguistics and historical pragmatics

Historical speech act studies can take one of two forms. Diachronic speech act analysis aims at charting the manifestations of speech acts through various periods by comparing two or more synchronic descriptions, but synchronic descriptions, dealing with one period only, are also possible. Language history presupposes a longer time line, and thus it is the former type of analysis that comes into focus in this volume.

It may be useful to start by comparing some key issues in historical linguistics, and look at how other, better-charted fields of language history and the better-established subfield of historical pragmatics, i.e. linguistic processes, deal with these key issues, and then go on to consider the case of speech act analysis in historical pragmatics. Historical speech act studies have several pitfalls, and different types of problems are encountered.

3.1 Language universals

Historical pragmatics is situated at the crossroads between pragmatics and historical linguistics (*Journal of Historical Pragmatics*, cover blurb), but the overlap is by no means complete. Language change is the core area where historical pragmatics meets historical linguistics, as studies on linguistic processes are central to both. Historical linguistics aims at adding to our historical knowledge about languages and language families, trying to explain and interpret language history (Lass 1997: xv), whereas historical pragmatics focuses on the meaning-making processes in past contexts. The latter studies show how meaning is negotiated and how more is conveyed than is said, and it takes language users into account (cf. Thomas 1995; Verschueren 1999). The area of overlap includes language change, but there are different emphases and different motivations become foregrounded. Traditionally, linguistic processes are discussed with phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic motivations, but some pragmatic aspects may demand other tools (see above). In general, the status of pragmatics in linguistic change is not a straightforward matter. Lass (1997: xviii) acknowledges the difficulties and concludes that the area is best avoided, touching upon it only in passing. Away from the common core there are other differences besides emphasis.²

2. The other main branch of historical linguistics with reconstruction of past forms and the comparative methods to establish genetic relationships form completely different research paradigms outside historical pragmatics.

Speech act studies cannot be squarely placed in the overlapping area of language change. For example, one of the corner-stones of historical linguistics, underlying most studies in the field, is the Uniformitarian principle. This has been explicitly discussed in connection with phonological reconstruction (Labov 1994: 23, 24–25; Lass 1997: 24–32) and sociohistorical linguistics. There are several different formulations of the theory ranging from strong claims³ to observations which take a safer stance (Labov 1972: 275) and approach the variationist principle (for a discussion, see Taavitsainen and Fitzmaurice 2007: 15–16). In her groundbreaking book on sociohistorical linguistics, Romaine (1982) takes the Uniformitarian principle as her point of departure, but in a somewhat modified form. She claims that “the linguistic forces which operate today and are observable around us are not unlike those which have operated in the past” (1982: 122; Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 2003: 22). Brinton (2007: 40) discusses the principles from the point of view of grammaticalisation and other linguistic processes, such as pragmaticalisation, lexicalisation, and idiomaticisation, and states that the underlying assumption is that pragmatic meaning works uniformly over periods and societies. The key to interpretation is the context of utterance. There is even a more general formulation of the Uniformitarian principle: “no linguistic state of affairs (structure, inventory, process, etc.) can have been the case only in the past” (Lass 1997: 25). This claim is interesting as even pragmatic phenomena like speech acts seem to repeat the basic patterns in slightly modified forms over the course of history. Ritual insults provide a case in point: they occur in Old English in *Beowulf*, in Old Icelandic sagas, in Middle Dutch romances, in the Finnish national epic the *Kalevala*, in health guides in Early Modern England, among London teenagers and black youths in New York, to name but a few manifestations that provide flashes of something that seems deeply rooted in human behaviour (Labov 1972; Arnovick 1999; Bax 1999; Jucker and Taavitsainen 2000; Hasund and Stenström 1997; Moik 2007; Chapman 2008). But the question of whether this is valid more generally, in other types of speech acts, remains to be answered in the future. Inherently polite speech acts can be more sensitive to changes of fashion and cultural variation (cf. the contrary meanings of gestures in different cultures), but, at the same time, this principle must hold at some level. People and human behaviour cannot have changed so much in the course of years, decades, and centuries.

3.2 Context

From the present point of view it is of interest that the Uniformitarian principle was formulated in the nineteenth century and underlies several fields of study in that

3. E.g. “the forces operating in linguistic change today are of the same kind and magnitude as those which operated in the past” (for a discussion, see Lass 1997: 24–32).

period.⁴ If we go back to philology with its emphasis on contextual interpretations, we find nineteenth-century scholars pondering how the nature and uses of speech must have been the same throughout the history of language (see Lass 1997: 28). The basic distinction in modern pragmatics between conventional and conversational implicature (Grice 1975, 1978; Levinson 1983: ch. 2) applies to historical interpretations as well: some pragmatic inferences are valid in multiple contexts while implicatures of conversational contexts may not be replicable. Jokes and insults have been mentioned in connection to this; unless the hearer is familiar with the culture and the context in which the speech act occurs, s/he may not be able to understand it (Taavitsainen and Fitzmaurice 2007: 16).

Other instances of verbal communication may be problematic as well. Meaning-making processes are sensitive to context and the meaning of an utterance may be completely different in different contexts, for example, the sentence “Your hair is so long?” (example 6 in Jucker et al. this volume) could be an expression of several speech acts with different meanings, depending on the context. It could be an indirect command “have your hair cut”, an insult or a compliment, or just a neutral statement. In spoken language the tone of voice and the intonation often make the intended meanings and illocutions explicit and help in the interpretation, but extralinguistic cues are lost in the written mode, and we have to rely on other means of interpretation. In some genres, like fiction, narrators’ comments are sometimes present and make the intended meanings explicit.

Meanings are negotiated, and we can make inferences by examining utterances in their context, taking various factors into account. In speech act studies we look at social action through fragments: instances of an activity type. In this activity, the context gives us clues on how to understand and interpret the speech act. The frame of the action and the response are important (cf. cognitive approaches). The context influences how we understand what we see, we may perceive a physical object from different perspectives by moving around it, weighing human activity in a local environment, with changes according to the angle of view.⁵ For example, a typical compliment formula can have the reverse meaning if the context so requires (see Jucker et al. this volume). In addition to local environments, various layers of context can be discerned, and we can move from more concrete to more abstract levels. In this way we may view speech acts from various perspectives and visualise them in a multidimensional space.

4. Lass (1997: 25) explains the issue by contrasting the following claims: “The principles governing the world (=the domain of inquiry) were the same in the past as they are now”, and “The laws of nature themselves evolve”.

5. Blommaert (2005) emphasizes this change of perspective in his ethnographic approach to discourse.

4. Pragmatic space

Speech acts are fuzzy concepts that show both diachronic and synchronic variation. In a multidimensional pragmatic space, speech acts can be analysed in relation to neighbouring speech acts, to their changing cultural groundings, and to ways in which they are realised (Jucker and Taavitsainen 2000). The fuzziness of speech acts requires a prototype approach; individual instances vary in their degree of conformity to their prototypical manifestations and sometimes the group identity is only vague. Our model allows a great deal of both diachronic and synchronic variation, and neighbouring speech acts can be defined in relation to one another in the pragmatic space, in analogy with the semantic field theory which views word meanings in relation to neighbouring words. The multidimensional space (cf. Biber 1988) allows conceptualisations of the different aspects and characteristics of speech acts. The model should be discussed, developed and tested further to see whether such a way of visualising speech act realisations can provide a model for diachronic speech act analysis (see Culpeper and Archer in this volume).

In our previous work we sketched the multidimensional space of the speech act of insults in the following way (Jucker and Taavitsainen 2000: 74):

<i>Formal level:</i>	ritual, rule governed ↔ creative
	typified ↔ ad hoc
<i>Semantics:</i>	truth-conditional ↔ performative
<i>Context dependence:</i>	conventional ↔ particular
<i>Speaker attitude:</i>	ludic ↔ aggressive
	intentional ↔ unintentional
	irony ↔ sincerity
<i>Reaction:</i>	reaction in kind ↔ denial, violence, silence

The point of departure is the description of the speech act with its distinctive, obligatory defining criteria, e.g. insults must contain a predication about the target, and this predication has to be perceived as disparaging. What people considered insulting is a matter of culture to a large extent, and with our speech-act verb survey of verbal aggression we achieved an ethnographic view of what was considered insulting (Taavitsainen and Jucker 2007).⁶ In this way, speech act studies can give us insights from within a society into its norms and values, from the point of view of people living and acting in the culture under investigation. We included non-intended insults in the category as well, but illocutions may count and an insult may be intended even if not perceived as such, so it is possible to draw the lines differently. Insults and compliments are alike in many respects, and the presence of irony or banter can reverse the meanings completely.

6. Our studies on speech act verbs of verbal aggression showed an ethnographic view of Victorian society where norms and values were negotiated e.g. with the verb *mock*.

Although the above framework was drafted for insults and verbal aggression, it can be applied to other speech acts and speech act categories. Of the Searlean categories (Assertives, Directives, Commissives, Expressives, and Declarations; Searle 1979: 12–16), several fit nicely into the framework and highlight different aspects of it. Expressive speech acts are often considered the most elusive and difficult category, expressing “the psychological state specified in the sincerity condition about a state of affairs specified in the propositional content” (Searle 1979: 15). Besides insults, apologies, compliments, thanks and greetings are some of the most important speech acts of the expressive category, and they have received attention both in the earlier studies and in this volume. For example, the dimension of irony versus sincerity becomes prominent with compliments. Apologies are expressed in routinised, perhaps even ritual and rule-governed forms, though creative instances can also be found. Commissives, in turn, highlight the problems of truth-conditional speech acts, and perhaps the same dimension is important for assertives as well. For directives, speaker attitudes are of special concern, with politeness issues at the forefront. Context and second turns need to be taken into account in all categories, and the dimension of typified/routine versus ad hoc is of special interest for the inventories of speech acts as well as for the methods of speech act retrieval from computerised corpora. This dimension (i.e. typified – ad hoc) is also genre-specific, e.g. in Middle English saints’ lives, insults are structurally important by providing the turning-points of the plot, and thus the dimension of ritual versus creative is highlighted.⁷

5. Speech acts and politeness

If we view diachronic speech act analysis as a form of contrastive analysis, historical speech act analysis is similar in some respects to contrastive analysis, but there are differences as well. The analysis relies on the identification of similar speech functions in different cultures so that we have *tertium comparationes* that remain constant across space or time. However, an important difference is found in the fact that contrastive analysis compares the realisations of a specific speech act in different cultures in two or more disparate contexts. In contrast, continuity is found between one stage of language and another in historical speech act analysis. There is a linear development from older stages of language to more recent phases. What this kind of development can tell us about politeness, for instance, is most interesting.

The speech acts that have received most attention are generally those that constitute face-threatening acts, e.g. requests, apologies, complaints, thanking (see below; cf. modern studies by Blum-Kulka et al. 1989; Trosborg 1994; Aijmer 1996; Lubecka 2000;

7. Chapman (2008) studies epithets in Old English insults surveying the semantic fields of adjectives used in insults. He found 256 tokens and 111 types used as insults in direct address. Only very few turned out to be creative.

Reiter 2000; Deutschmann 2003; Fukushima 2003). Because of this close affinity, it is relevant to discuss the issue of culture-specificity versus universal validity of Brown and Levinson's politeness theory based on face wants, "the want of every 'competent adult member' that his actions be unimpeded by others" (Brown and Levinson 1987: 67). It has been claimed that this key issue does not hold in all cultures and that the universal significance of the theory is a gross mistake (e.g. Matsumoto 1988: 404; see also Matsumoto 1989). Instead, the want to go unimpeded is a fundamentally cultural script, quintessentially English, reflecting one of the corner-stones of the Anglo-American culture (Wierzbicka 2006: 57, 199).

Apologies, for instance, can be seen as face-threats to the speaker's own positive face because they acknowledge an offence or a perceived offence for which the speaker is responsible (Jucker and Taavitsainen this volume). In Modern English, apologies tend to be routinized expressions of remorse and regret. In particular, the phrase *I am sorry* or just *sorry* focuses on the speaker's emotion (see also Deutschmann 2003). In Early Modern English apologies were less routinized and more often involved phrases such as *pardon me* or *excuse me*, which ask for the addressee's forgiveness and thus also constitute a face-threat to the addressee's negative face.

Requests in Middle English, to take another example, were often made as directives indicating the speaker's desire (Kohnen 2002). By the end of the Middle English period this was no longer seen as appropriate. The wishes of the speaker alone were no longer seen as sufficient justification for a request, and the co-operation of the addressee was seen as an important factor giving rise to indirect requests indicating negative politeness, i.e. a consideration for, or at least a token acknowledgment of, the addressee's wish not to be imposed upon. Towards the end of the Early Modern period directives became more conventionalized through the use of expressions or "politeness markers" (Kohnen 2002: 173) such as *pray*, *I beseech you*, *do me a favour* or, later still, *please*.

Thus, the diachronic development of speech acts can reveal the formation of cultural scripts. There are differences between speech acts in their relation to the notion of face, as understood by Brown and Levinson. For example

Orders and requests can easily threaten rapport, because they affect our autonomy, freedom of choice, and freedom from imposition, and this threatens our sense of equity rights (our entitlement to considerate treatment). (Spencer-Oatey 2000: 17)

In compliments, the connection with French court culture and cultural influences from outside are clear (Taavitsainen and Jucker this volume).

In a historical perspective, politeness in English society, as witnessed by written texts of the past, especially fiction and drama, has moved from positive politeness culture to negative politeness (Kopytko 1993, 1995; Jucker 2006). However, in the form of address terms in private letters, there is also evidence for the opposite development, i.e. in the direction of more positive politeness (e.g. Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995; Raumolin-Brunberg 1996; Nevala 2004). Their *Corpus of Early English Correspondence* ranging from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century revealed a development

from a predominance of negatively polite honorifics to a predominance of positively polite nicknames and terms of endearment. One important reason for this development might be the growing privacy of personal letters in the centuries under investigation (see Jucker 2006). This development, therefore, does not provide counter-evidence for the more general trend towards the negative politeness culture described above.

6. Research methods and research questions

As always, research methods and research questions are closely linked. The available research methods narrow down the questions that we can ask, and specific research questions require specific research methods. The first studies of speech acts were carried out by philosophers. Austin (1962) and Searle (1969, 1975, 1979) used philosophical methods to think about speech acts. They tried to find out what it means to use language for certain effects, and they reflected on the specific conditions that have to be met if speakers are to successfully christen a ship, make a bet, ask a question or give a piece of advice. Such methods are clearly unsuitable for historical investigations. While we may reach fairly reliable answers when we ask ourselves what it means to issue a command or to make a promise, we cannot ask such questions about earlier stages of the language. However, in the meantime, the range of research methods used in speech act analysis has seen considerable expansion.

In addition to the philosophical approaches, experimental methods and, later, corpus-based methods have been developed. Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), for instance, developed discourse completion tasks that were used in cross-cultural speech act research. Informants for a range of different languages were asked to fill in blank spaces in constructed dialogues in order to get specific and carefully controlled realisations of requests or apologies. Trosborg (1994) added role-plays and role enactments to the inventory of speech act research methods. Participants were asked to improvise scenes in which requests, complaints or apologies were likely to figure prominently. In the case of role enactments, participants played roles that they were familiar with from their own daily lives. In the case of role-plays they also acted out unfamiliar roles, for instance, a participant who, in his or her normal life is a student, may play the role of a professor. However, such experimental methods are also unsuitable for historical investigations.

Historical investigations depend on corpus-based methodologies, and these were developed rather late in the history of speech act research. We can distinguish between manual searches of small-scale corpora and computerized searches of large corpora. Both can be applied to historical data, but the latter depend on large-scale computer-readable corpora and appropriate search algorithms, both of which have only become available relatively recently. One of the first large-scale computer-based investigations of a speech act in Present-day English was carried out by Deutschmann (2003), who investigated apologies in the one-hundred million words of the *British National Corpus*.

Manual methods have a longer history. Lötscher (1981), for instance, investigated the use of swear words and insults in the history of Swiss German, and Lebsanft (1988) investigated greetings in Old French (see Jacobs and Jucker 1995: 21). In recent years, similar investigations in English have proliferated, see e.g. Hughes (1991) and McEnery (2005) on swearing, Arnovick (1999), Jucker and Taavitsainen (2000) on insults, Busse (2002) on requests, Milfull (2004) on advice in Middle Scots, or Arnovick (1994) and Pakkala-Weckström (2002) on promises in Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale*.

Manual methods either focus on a fairly small corpus, e.g. Pakkala-Weckström (this volume), who concentrates on promises in Chaucer's work or Busse (this volume), who concentrates on directives in one particular play, i.e. Shakespeare's *King Lear*, or else they are necessarily eclectic. In Jucker and Taavitsainen (2000), for instance, we investigated insults from Old English to Present-day English by picking out relevant examples in the history of English on the basis of our own reading and of the relevant literature. This is called "illustrative eclecticism" (see Culpeper and Archer this volume)

Computerized searches for specific speech acts can only be undertaken if the speech act tends to occur in routinized forms, with recurrent phrases and or with standard Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFIDs). Deutschmann (2003), for instance, analyzed apologies that tend to occur in routinized forms or with the IFID *sorry*. In some cases, specific speech acts can also be realized with the speech act verb itself used performatively, as in the case of "I hereby apologize". Thus the investigation is based on a selection of representative features throughout the history of English or at least some part of the history of English. This is called "structured eclecticism" (see Culpeper and Archer this volume).

7. The papers in this volume

In this volume we want to continue the efforts in tracking histories of individual speech acts and classes of speech acts in the history of the English language. All the papers of this volume, with varying emphases, have the dual aim of tracing specific histories of individual speech acts or speech act classes and of further developing the necessary methodologies for doing so. Most of the papers are also united by the fact that they take advantage of the increased availability of historical corpora. It is less than twenty years ago that the *Helsinki Corpus*, as the first electronic corpus on historical principles, became available. In the meantime, a large number of historical corpora have been developed, many of them much larger than the *Helsinki Corpus* and most of them more specialized in terms of the text types that are included.

Obviously we are not in a position to offer a comprehensive view of all the speech acts of the English language, and it is more than doubtful whether this will ever be possible. We can offer no more than some illustrative examples. It is not even possible to give a balanced view of all the different types of speech acts, but the papers in this

volume clearly fall into three main groups. The first group comprises papers on directives and commissives in Searle's (1979: 14, 15) terminology, i.e. on speech acts in which the speaker tries to get the hearer to do something, or undertakes to do something herself.⁸ The second group contains papers on assertives and expressives, i.e. on speech acts in which the speaker reports a state of affairs, or in which she expresses her feelings. Finally, the third group consists of three papers that take the form of technical reports. They focus on the technical problems of automatically retrieving and identifying speech acts from computer-readable corpora.

Commissives and directives have a common feature in that they have the same direction of fit, word-to-world. They express in words what is to happen in the world. In the case of the directive, it is the addressee who is expected to bring about the fit. He is to carry out what the speaker asks him to do, where the force of the asking can, of course, range from a well-meant piece of advice, which leaves the addressee a lot of freedom to comply or not to comply, to unequivocal commands, which demand incontrovertible and immediate compliance. What they also have in common is that they constitute face threats to the negative face. In the case of a directive, it is the negative face of the addressee that is threatened. The directive – with varying degrees of force – is intended to get the addressee to do something that he might not have done otherwise, and thus it limits, in a relevant way, his freedom of action and freedom from imposition, in the sense of Brown and Levinson (1987). In the case of commissives, the speaker threatens her own negative face in that she reduces her own freedom of action by committing herself to a particular course of action.

It is not surprising, therefore, that most papers address issues of politeness. Face threats require face work and face work is usually – depending on the chosen framework – called politeness. In particular, the relationship between indirectness and politeness is discussed in several papers in this issue. In Present-day English, so-called indirect requests like “Could you please at least tell them it's quite urgent?” (BNC A0F 1071) or “Would you mind polishing some of these smelly glasses?” (BNC BP9 345) are very common, and they show features of negative politeness, i.e. they pay token respect to the freedom of the addressee not to comply with the request. Recent research has shown that such negatively polite strategies have developed relatively late in the history of English (e.g. Kohnen 2002, 2004a, 2004b), and several papers in this volume provide additional evidence that older stages of English used different strategies for polite directives. Directives that would appear impolite or even rude today seem to have been quite common.

In his first contribution to this volume, **Kohnen** focuses on the Old English period using as his data the Old English part of the *Helsinki Corpus* and the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus*. He analyses four specific manifestations of directive speech acts: directive performatives, i.e. constructions with an explicit performative speech act verb,

8. We are using the standard convention of employing a generic female pronoun for the speaker and a generic male pronoun for the addressee.

such as *Ic bidde eow þæt* ‘I ask you to’; constructions such as *þu scealt* and *ge sculon* ‘you shall’; constructions with *uton* plus infinitive, which correspond roughly to Present-day English *let’s* plus infinitive; and impersonal constructions with *(neod)þearf* ‘it is necessary’. These forms differ in terms of their coercive force. Directive performative and *scealt / sculon* constructions are very direct and they clearly state who is to comply with the request. The *uton* constructions and the impersonal constructions, on the other hand, are less direct and do not name the addressee directly.

The results suggest that face-saving strategies that are so common in Present-day English do not seem to have played a significant role in Old English. Directive performatives were common for commands and requests but not for suggestions and advice. The other directly coercive type of construction, the *scealt / sculon* constructions, appears to be particularly common in secular and Germanic contexts, while the two types of constructions that are less coercive and stress the common ground between the speaker and the addressee, the *uton* constructions and the impersonal *(neod)þearf* constructions, are more common in religious prose.

Culpeper and Archer discuss one particular type of directive, i.e. requests, and in particular they use this speech act to investigate changes in the level of indirectness. They discuss Searle’s (1975) claim that indirectness is a matter of deducing the intended meaning on the basis of the literal and explicit meaning of the utterance plus an inferencing apparatus such as Grice’s conversational implicature. However, they argue that a certain amount of inferencing is also required for what are considered to be direct speech acts. Moreover, what are considered to be indirect speech acts are often conventionalised to such an extent that no inferencing is needed to arrive at the intended meaning. In fact, they strongly argue for a model of utterance interpretation that is enriched by social context information, such as the social status of speaker and addressee and issues of politeness. Such information often allows the more laborious inferential process to be short-circuited on the basis of Grice’s conversational implicature.

In an attempt to classify the requests of their play and trial data from 1640 to 1760, Culpeper and Archer use Blum-Kulka et al.’s (1989) CCSARP coding scheme, but they find that it is not really suited to the task. In fact, they conclude that requests in their data are dramatically different from those in the six modern languages investigated by Blum-Kulka et al. In all these modern languages, conventional indirectness was by far the most frequent strategy. In Culpeper and Archer’s data it is the imperatives which turn out to be by far the most frequent strategy. It would appear, therefore, that seventeenth and eighteenth-century speakers of English were less polite, but it is clear that this conclusion is not supported by the facts. There is no direct correlation between indirectness and politeness.

Busse’s paper, in contrast, has a broad focus on a large range of directives and a very narrow focus on a particular period in the history of the English language. He, in fact, uses one single play as his data, namely one of Shakespeare’s greatest tragedies, *King Lear*. This play is particularly suitable for an investigation of directives because

Lear's own use of directives throughout the play mirrors his downfall from a position of power into destitution and madness.

Busse first compiles an inventory of linguistic forms that were available to Shakespeare for expressing directives, such as imperatives and related forms, and, in the next step, assesses their precise discourse function in terms of their coercive force – or manipulative strength, as he calls it – on the one hand and their politeness on the other. In a scene-by-scene analysis of the play he shows how, at the beginning, Lear expects everybody to obey his commands; there is little need for politeness on his part, while the other characters react with polished politeness. As the play progresses, however, things start to change. The characters still observe the formalities of polite formulations but it is increasingly clear that these formulations no longer reflect a true concern for the feelings of others (“true politeness”) but only what Brown and Gilman (1989: 207) have called “a set of practices, as a way of putting things when making a criticism or request”. At the end of the play, Lear is reduced to pleading and begging and to using the subjunctive mood to express his wishes and desires.

Del Lungo Camiciotti notes the close relationship between commissives and directives. Both are used to try to get somebody to do something. The directives are to try to get the hearer to do something and the commissives commit the speaker to doing something. As such, the two are particularly germane to business communications where speakers or writers try to get their addressee to do something in return for something that the speaker or writer is willing to commit herself to. As data, Del Lungo Camiciotti uses a letter-writing manual that consists of actual business letters that had been edited by the compiler for didactic purposes. The model letters were intended to introduce young men in Italy to the writing of business letters in English. On the basis of these letters she argues that the coercive force of requests is not mitigated through indirectness but through standardized modulations. Illocutions are generally expressed directly and unambiguously, sometimes even with an explicit performative speech act verb, but they are attenuated by appropriate politeness devices. The most frequent one is *please*, which appears in constructions such as *You will please + verb* or *Be pleased + verb*. Commitments are also generally direct and explicit, but they are rarely realized by performative speech acts. Most common are the formulations *I/We shall* and *I/We will*, which are often modified by positive adjectives, such as *glad*, *happy*, *ready*. Thus, in these nineteenth-century business letters, both directives and commissives are formulated in explicit and unambiguous ways, but they are modulated in appropriate ways to convey the appropriate level of politeness.

Pakkala-Weckström focuses on commissives in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and other Middle English literary narratives. In Present-day English, a promise is only successful if the speaker has the appropriate state of mind. If the speaker has no intention of doing what she promises, the promise is considered to be insincere and faulty. Searle captured this intuition with the concept of felicity conditions, and, in particular, the essential condition, i.e. the conditions that speakers need to have the appropriate thoughts. Through a close analysis of relevant examples, Pakkala-Weckström shows

that in her Middle English data the feelings and intentions of the speaker are of much less importance. In the context of the then-prevailing oral culture, promises once uttered were considered to be binding. Her analytical method consists of a careful combination of manual searches and computerized searches based on recurring phrases and expressions in promises. This method uncovers a broad range of relevant instances of promises while, at the same time, allowing her to provide rich and contextualized interpretations of specific instances of promises.

The second group of papers deals with **assertives and expressives**. In contrast to directives and commissives, these speech acts have a direction of fit from world-to-words. The speaker tries to fit her words to the world. Speech acts of these two types have received much less attention than the face-threatening directives and commissives. Representatives of these types report a certain state of affairs, and as such they correspond to what Austin had called “constatives”. They are speech acts that have a truth value, and they typically put into words what is already the case in the world. Expressives, on the other hand and in a very general sense, indicate the speaker’s feelings. They comprise speech acts such as greetings, insults, compliments and apologies. In speech acts such as greetings and apologies the truth of what is said is not at issue. Greetings do not even have a propositional content that could be true or not, and they also lack sincerity conditions (Searle 1969: 67). Greetings are exchanged as courteous recognitions of the addressee who has just been encountered. Apologies, on the other hand, constitute a face-threat to the speaker’s own positive face because they acknowledge an offence or a potential offence for which the speaker feels responsible. Insults and compliments are less clear-cut cases. They both depend to a large extent on the reaction of the hearer because they express a proposition that is either perceived as unfriendly and demeaning or as friendly and polite. Such perceptions may differ from one person to the other and, as a result, utterances can be heard as insults or compliments by the addressee even if the speaker did not intend them as such. The papers in this section focus on greetings, compliments and apologies.

Grzega looks at greetings from a diachronic perspective, and, in fact, he shows that not all greetings are expressives. The greetings that have been used in English over the centuries fluctuate between explicitly formulated wishes or questions and simple conversational markers. They can be mainly assertive or mainly expressive. They can be formally transparent or formally opaque. They can be fairly long in a desire to be original and to flatter the addressee or they can be very brief and routinized. Grzega’s investigation is mainly based on the relevant historical dictionaries and corpora. He starts with a search for Latin glosses “ave/ae, salve/salve; avete/auete, salve/salve” and their Old English translations, and with a search for dictionary entries with relevant sense descriptions. On this basis he gives a chronological overview of the terms that have been used in the history of English as greeting terms, and in a second part he categorizes the greeting terms according to the motivation for their form. It turns out that in Old English attention getters and wishes for good health were particularly common, while in Middle English they were replaced by inquiries after the health of the

addressee and wishes for a good time. But different types of greetings, old forms and innovations often co-existed for a considerable length of time.

Taavitsainen and Jucker give an outline of the history of compliments in English. Today, the term “compliment” is used in a narrow sense for expressions of praise and admiration about the addressee, and it often has the additional sense of being insincere, issued only to please the addressee even if the words do not fit the world. In Early Modern England, the term had a wider application. It referred to ceremonial acts and acts of courtesy, such as greetings, farewells, condolences, requests and thanks. Both in the modern sense and in the older sense, compliments are culture-specific and gendered speech acts, loaded with cultural values and associated with cultural norms.

The analysis, which is mostly based on literary data, focuses on the historical development of the narrow concept of the modern compliment. It pays close attention to sociohistorical factors like rank, gender, age, and the genre of writing. As social moves, compliments may have multiple motivations. The material contains plenty of irony and sarcastic language use, which was to be expected in literary data, as critical or even negative speaker illocutions may be disguised in seemingly positive utterances. Affective and instrumental goals are closely intertwined, often difficult to tell apart.

The historical dimension poses additional challenges with period-specific norms and polite behaviour. Looks proved to be the most common topic, but the paucity of compliments, for example on possessions, is likely to be connected with societal norms. Compliments seem to have been gender-specific in the early periods as well as today. They are controversial: on the one hand they are connected with positive politeness to create solidarity and intimacy between parties of communication and, on the other hand, they may be perceived as face-threatening speech acts, with issues of power. The same wording can be interpreted quite differently depending on subtle nuances of the situation. Responses to compliments vary, the most common reaction being downplaying the compliment to the category of flattery.

The second aim of the paper is methodological. It assesses the possibilities of speech act retrieval in computerized corpora for qualitative analysis. A search for the speech act label “compliment” provides plenty of material and thus offers an ethnographic view of how speakers describe, classify and evaluate this speech act. This method can best be described as a computer-aided ethnographic survey. In addition, lexical searches for expressions of positive evaluations were used to locate actual compliments in the data. These examples provide evidence that many compliments in the historical data appear in routinized forms, and thus they offer a historical extension to the claims made by Manes and Wolfson (1981) and Holmes (1988) about the routine nature of the speech act of complimenting in Present-day English.

The last paper in this section, by **Jucker and Taavitsainen**, deals with apologies. An apology is a face-threat to the speaker’s own positive face and Present-day English realisations are highly routinized and depend on a small range of conventionalized lexical forms. Jucker and Taavitsainen take these routinized forms as the point of departure and provide a case study of diachronic speech act analysis in a contrastive

frame. The focus is on performative realizations of apologies in Renaissance data (*LION*, Chadwyck Healey on-line corpora 1500–1660) as compared to Present-day findings in large corpus data (BNC; Deutschmann 2003). Imitations of spontaneous dialogues in the fiction and drama sections of *Lion* were used to retrieve the material. The data comprises a fairly substantial and very important subset of all apologies in the period, as it catches the IFIDs that constitute the routinized and lexicalized expression of an apology in Present-day English.

The underlying assumption of both contrastive and diachronic analyses of apologies is that the core of this speech function is sufficiently similar across languages or across the history of one language; what differs is the realisation of the apology. The results reveal that the act of apologizing was less routinized and more explicit in earlier periods. A fairly small inventory of syntactic forms of apologies was established. The same lexical elements as in Present-day English could already be used, but they did not have the same independent force as today. No fully detached apologies were found; only a few examples appear more detached, but still embedded in longer turns, e.g. in negotiations of interpersonal relations. Thus the components of apologies (offender, offended, offence and remedy) are more explicit in the earlier period.

Renaissance speakers seem to apologize for different types of offences than Present-day speakers of English: for a lack of decorum in their speech, for being too outspoken or for speaking above their social rank, and they ask God for forgiveness for various types of misdemeanours. Another important feature also emerged, as the data revealed a change from addressee-centred apologies to more speaker-centred apologies. Apologizers asked their addressees to show generosity and forgive or overlook the perpetrated offence. Present-day speakers often avoid this kind of imposition and apologize by expressing their own remorse without presuming or requesting any change of attitude on the part of the addressee. This change confirms a development to a higher level of negative politeness in Present-day English.

In addition to the two parts of this book representing two large groups of speech acts, this volume contains a third group of three papers that differ considerably from the others. They are **technical papers** in that they focus on the search techniques that are used to extract speech acts from computer-readable corpora. These papers have been added in the hope that other scholars may profit from the problems encountered and the experience gained by the authors of these papers in the process of carrying out corpus-linguistic speech act research in historical corpora.

It is one of the aims of speech act research to develop algorithms that can automatically annotate the utterances in a large corpus with appropriate speech act labels. At present, such an endeavour seems to be faced with insurmountable difficulties. However, the following papers may well present some modest first steps in this direction. In order to reach the goal of automatic speech act annotation, we have to be able to identify individual speech acts, for instance requests, apologies or compliments, on the basis of their surface form within a specific context. The work by Aijmer (1996) and Deutschmann (2003) on Present-day English is significant in this respect. Aijmer

(1996) extracted thanks, apologies, complaints and offers from the *London-Lund Corpus*, and Deutschmann (2003) extracted apologies from the *British National Corpus*. In a general sense, we must make sure that we can correctly identify specific utterances as apologies, for instance, (the corpus-linguistic problem of precision) and that we can identify all the utterances in a given corpus that are actually apologies (the problem of recall). Once we have reached satisfactory levels of precision and recall for individual speech acts, we can cast our net wider and develop algorithms for a larger number of speech acts. But from there, it is still a long way to a comprehensive speech act annotation algorithm that covers all the speech acts of a particular language, especially if the algorithm is to have any historical application. In that case, our algorithm would have to be able to identify speech act values across a large range of genres and across different periods in the development of a language. Considering such a broad perspective, the following technical reports are a very modest beginning indeed. However, against the background of our current knowledge in this area they may provide some significant contributions towards that goal.

The papers by Valkonen and by Jucker, Schneider, Taavitsainen and Breustedt concentrate on specific speech acts. The former is devoted to the search for promises, while the latter to that for compliments. The authors of both papers develop search algorithms that retrieve relevant surface manifestations from large corpora. This procedure always runs the risk that some relevant speech acts are missed because they appear in surface manifestations that are not accounted for by the search algorithms. Kohonen, however, concentrates on a class of speech acts, i.e. directives, and tries to avoid this same risk by carrying out comprehensive manual searches of small sample corpora. On this basis, he can extend his searches to larger corpora with greater confidence.

Valkonen uses the ARCHER (i.e. *A Representative Corpus of Historical English Registers*) and the Chadwyck-Healey Eighteenth Century Fiction database (ECF) for his search for promises. His lexical-morphosyntactic search patterns are based primarily on the relevant speech act verbs from Wierzbicka's (1987) list of verbs for promises, i.e. "promise", "pledge", "vow", "swear", "vouch for" and "guarantee" (see also Verschueren 1994). As the first step, he retrieves sentences containing any of these verbs from a small pilot corpus. In the second step, he applies extended search strings that are based on patterns found in the pilot corpus to a much larger testing corpus. This procedure allows him to establish accurate figures for the precision and recall of his patterns in the testing corpus. He finds that more than 97 per cent of all instances are based on the verbs "promise", "swear" and "vow". The other verbs together constitute less than three per cent of all cases, and he reports interesting individual differences between eighteenth-century authors. It is not only the overall frequency of promises that differs from one author to the other but also the choice of individual performative verbs that are used to promise.

Valkonen's search patterns are restricted to performative instances of promises, i.e. promises in which an appropriate speech act verb is used in order to carry out the action described by the verb. Jucker, Schneider, Taavitsainen and Breustedt, on the

other hand, investigate compliments which are rarely, if ever, performed with a performative speech act verb. While it sounds entirely natural to say “I hereby promise to ...”, it would be strange to say “I hereby compliment you on ...”. Their search strings, therefore, depend on more abstract routinized surface patterns. As a starting point they take the compliment patterns that have been established by Manes and Wolfson (1981) on the basis of their corpus of compliments collected with the diary method. These patterns were transformed into search strings and applied to the *British National Corpus*, a one-hundred-million word corpus of spoken and written Present-day English. In most cases the search patterns return many matches that cannot be classified as compliments (the corpus-linguistic problem of precision), and at the same time the searches fail to retrieve all compliments (the problem of recall). By a combination of modified search strings and careful manual classification of samples of matches, they nevertheless manage to provide realistic approximations of the number of compliments in their corpus.

Kohnen, in his second paper in this volume, presents a technical report on retrieving directives from computer readable corpora. In Present-day English, directives are often realized in indirect or hedged form. However, he quotes relevant literature that shows that indirect directives developed relatively late in the history of the English language. In earlier centuries, and, in particular, in Old English, performative directives were more common, i.e. instances in which the speaker explicitly refers to the act of requesting or commanding by saying something like “I hereby ask you to ...”. In addition to the directive performatives that are based on a small number of relevant speech act verbs, Kohnen uses a range of additional surface representations of directives, i.e. constructions involving a second-person pronoun plus *scealt / sculon*, constructions with *uton* plus infinitive (this construction is usually paraphrased in Modern English with *let's* plus infinitive), and impersonal constructions with *(neod)þearf* ‘it is necessary for x’.

It is clear that this kind of research is still in its early stages. The three papers in this volume cannot be more than a starting point in the automatic retrieval of a very small number of different speech acts. In spite of the undoubted success, the achieved levels of precision and recall are still modest, and the search techniques are far from automatic, they had to be supplemented by manual analyses in all cases. Moreover, in all three cases, the search techniques could not retrieve less routinized instances of the chosen speech acts. Valkonen retrieved all explicit performative promises, but missed those that were carried out in a more indirect way. Jucker, Schneider, Taavitsainen and Breustedt relied on the surface representations of compliments established by Manes and Wolfson (1981) and presumably missed other more original and less routinized compliments. And Kohnen relied on a small range of surface representations of directives in addition to the explicit performative directives, and thus had to ignore a presumably rather large number of directives that were realized in the form of imperatives or inverted constructions with the third-person subjunctive.

A lot more research will be needed in this area in order to achieve greater reliability of retrieval while at the same time reducing the need for manual intervention. At the same time, a lot more research will be needed to reach a more comprehensive coverage of speech acts. Ultimately, however, this kind of research may turn out to be the first steps in the direction of automatic pragmatic tagging of large corpora.

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Directives and commissives

Directives in Old English

Beyond politeness?

Thomas Kohnen

1. Introduction

The study of directive speech acts in the history of English raises some interesting questions which may not come up in a purely synchronic analysis. Today, orders, requests and similar speech acts are usually seen as typical examples of face-threatening acts. In our society they are often felt to threaten the addressee's negative face, that is, the freedom of action and freedom from imposition.¹ Against this background, the existence of a large inventory of so-called indirect directives in present-day English can easily be explained (for example, *Could you give me a hand? Will you do me a favour?*). Some recent studies suggest that many indirect speech acts have developed fairly late in the history of English. For example, clear cases of interrogative manifestations of directives are difficult to find before the Early Modern period. The same seems to apply to other indirect directives (see Kohnen 2002, 2004a and b). On the other hand, more straightforward manifestations of directives, which would often appear as inappropriate or impolite today, seem to have been quite common in previous periods in the history of English. This raises questions about the speech act conventions and the level of linguistic politeness in previous centuries. Were people in earlier periods of English rude or impolite in their behaviour or did they only follow different patterns of interaction? What were the normal requirements of friendly interaction then?²

The present paper starts with these questions, focussing on the period of Old English. It attempts to find out whether considerations of politeness and face work determined the choice of directive speech acts in Anglo-Saxon England. Four manifestations of directive speech acts will be analysed: directive performatives (based on Kohnen 2000), constructions involving a second-person pronoun plus *scealt / sculon*, constructions with *uton* plus infinitive (usually paraphrased with *let's* plus infinitive), and

1. On face, face wants and face work see Brown and Levinson (1987).

2. Of course, similar questions come up when speech-act conventions of different cultures are compared (see, for example, Blum-Kulka et al. 1989). The difference, however, is that there may be hardly any links between speech-act conventions of disparate cultures, whereas the diachronic study of speech acts in one language can aim at revealing a coherent development.

impersonal constructions with (*neod*)*þearf* ‘it is necessary for x’. From the perspective of contemporary English these four manifestations of directives have different implications for politeness and face work. Whereas directive performatives and the constructions explicitly stating an obligation for the addressee (*þu scealt, ge sculon*) suggest a direct and rather impolite formulation, constructions with *uton*, which usually include the addressor, can be seen as strategies of positive politeness (see Brown and Levinson 1987: 127). Constructions stating the necessity of an act can be understood as less face threatening since they relegate the motivation to the sphere of objective duty.

In the following sections I will first address some general issues connected with methodology and data. Then I will analyse the frequency and distribution of the four manifestations of directive speech acts. I will look at the typical communicative settings in which they are used and try to establish to what extent considerations of politeness and face work may be said to have been relevant for their formulation. In my conclusion I will attempt to find a preliminary answer to the question of whether communication in Anglo-Saxon society and the speech acts embedded in it were governed by face work or whether it was a world “beyond politeness” in the modern sense of the term.

2. Methodology and data

It is a well-known fact in historical pragmatics that the diachronic study of speech acts faces severe problems of methodology (see, for example, Bertuccelli Papi 2000; Jucker 2000; Jucker and Taavitsainen 2000; Kohnen 2004b and 2007). One of the most serious drawbacks is that it is virtually impossible to recover all the possible manifestations of a particular speech act in a past period. How are we to know all the ways in which speakers in Anglo-Saxon England made requests? Even scholars with intimate knowledge of the data that have come down to us will have to rely on a more or less intuitive and eclectic list of forms which they assume to be typical of Anglo-Saxon interaction. The present study is also eclectic in this sense. However, it is based on a broader pilot study which covered all the manifestations of directives in a restricted corpus of Old English sermons and homilies (Kohnen 2007). The present four manifestations were chosen for this investigation because they seem to present, at least from the perspective of contemporary English, convenient starting points for the assessment of face work and politeness in Old English directives. First, as was pointed out above, they have differing, nearly complementary implications with regard to directness and the inclusion / exclusion of the addressor; and, secondly, although they are quite common

manifestations, their number is still manageable even in larger corpora.³ But it must be kept in mind that any investigation of the different manifestations of Old English directives will necessarily be fragmentary because the list of Old English directives, although it may be growing with additional research, is only an approximation to the full inventory which must have been available to Anglo-Saxon speakers.⁴

The data used in this investigation stem from the Old English section of the *Helsinki Corpus* (see Kytö 1996; Kahlas-Tarkka et al. 1993)⁵, the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus* (DOEC) and, in one case, the electronic version of the *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* compiled by Bosworth and Toller (Bosworth and Toller 1898, 1921). The *Helsinki Corpus* is a principled collection of texts which, despite the paramount difficulties presented by the Old English data, follows the established principles of corpus compilation. The DOEC, on the other hand, is a comprehensive data base containing virtually all Old English texts which have come down to us. The DOEC can hardly be called representative because it contains the texts which happen to survive, with undue weight on West Saxon manuscripts and the religious sphere. The electronic version of Bosworth and Toller was used only to check some Modern English items used in the description of the senses of Old English directive verbs.

In the interpretation of the examples found in the data as much information about genre and other contextual factors was taken into consideration as was possible. If an insufficient number of items was found in one text type of the *Helsinki Corpus*, various text types were combined to form a text prototype, which might then include a sufficient number of examples (on diachronic text prototypes see Rissanen and Kytö 1993: 13).

Under which circumstances can an item be counted as a directive? This study follows Searle's account of directive speech acts, which defines a directive as an attempt by a speaker or writer to get the addressee to carry out an act (Searle 1969: 66, 1976: 11). This, of course, implies a direct interaction between addressor and addressee. In this study an item counts as a directive only if it is directly aimed by an addressor at an addressee. The addressor may be the author of a text, or the fictional or reported

3. Two other manifestations, imperatives and inverted constructions with the 3rd-person subjunctive, are so common in Old English that it seems virtually impossible to carry out a comprehensive study of them in a large corpus covering many different genres. For example, in one single homily of Wulfstan, containing only 1,980 words ("Her ongynd be Cristendome", Bethurum 1957: 200-210), 81 inverted 3rd-person constructions were found. The problem is not only the sheer number of examples but also the difficulty of clearly distinguishing different contexts which might allow some conclusions on the possible "face value" of the construction.

4. On an alternative way of dealing with this problem see Taavitsainen and Jucker (2007). Here speech acts are approached from the perspective of speech act verbs. The set of speech act verbs can be determined for the major periods in the history of English and can thus be systematically retrieved in a historical corpus.

5. The Old English section of the *Helsinki Corpus* contains 413,250 words. In my study on directive performatives, however, one excerpt, the *Durham Ritual*, was excluded (see Kohnen 2000: 305). Thus the data comprise 402,700 words there.

protagonist in a represented interaction; the addressee may be the recipient of the text (for example, the recipient of a letter or the audience in a sermon) or, in a fictional or reported account, the partner in a represented interaction. Directives addressed at third parties were not included in this study.

Within the Searlian framework a speech act is usually linked to (the utterance of) a sentence or clause. Thus, in the present analysis it is assumed that a directive is usually expressed by a (spoken or written) language unit which corresponds to a sentence or clause, not to longer stretches of discourse or whole texts.⁶

3. Old English directives: Four case studies

3.1 Directive performatives

The typical pattern of a directive performative contains a directive speech-act verb (in the first person singular or plural indicative active), an object (usually referring to the addressee) and the requested act (often expressed by a subordinate clause introduced by *þæt*).⁷

- (1) *Ic bidde eow þæt 3e 3ymon eowra sylfra, swa eowere bec eow wissiað.*
(Helsinki Corpus, Ælfric, Letter to Wulfsige, 26)
'I ask you to take care of yourselves, as your books teach you.'

One important result of the investigation of Old English directive performatives (Kohnen 2000) was that these constructions can be found in many different text types and that they were apparently much more common in Old English than they are in Modern (written) English (a frequency of four items per 10,000 words in the Old English section of the *Helsinki Corpus* as opposed to 0.55 in the *LOB Corpus*). In addition, no performative use of verbs denoting suggestion or advice could be found in the data, that is, the performative verbs usually reflect an asymmetric communication situation, with the addressor either in a subordinate or in a superior position. Possible explanations for these two findings are the largely oral Anglo-Saxon culture on the one hand and the strict hierarchy of Anglo-Saxon society on the other. One may assume that oral cultures typically use more performative formulae than firmly established literary cultures⁸ and that in a strictly hierarchical society directives would be typically embedded in an asymmetric communication situation.

6. On a different approach, which distinguishes between different sub-units in a directive, see Archer and Culpeper, this volume.

7. For a detailed account of the explicit performatives in Old English see Kohnen (2000).

8. A comparison with the Latin sources of the data revealed that in more than 27 per cent of the examples involving a Latin source the Old English translator had added a performative.

Were there really no performatives denoting suggestion or advice in Old English? The data provided by the *Helsinki Corpus* might be called somewhat limited, and one might wish for a broader basis for such a general claim. With the availability of further electronic resources more evidence can be found, corroborating the lack of the above performatives. The *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* compiled by Bosworth and Toller (1898, 1921) can now be searched electronically, including searches for Modern English items and their corresponding Old English expressions.⁹

A search for the Modern English items *suggest* and *advise* revealed that they are used in the description of several Old English verbs ((*ge*)*manian*, (*ge*)*rædan*, *getreowan*, *læran*, *scyan*, *tyhtan*) and in the translations of the respective illustrative examples.¹⁰ The verb *suggest* is used in the description / translation of *getreowan*, *læran*, *manian*, *scyan* and *tyhtan*, the verb *advise* for (*ge*)*rædan*, (*ge*)*manian* and *læran*.

In the entries found, *suggest* is used above all in the sense of ‘persuade, prompt’. With *getreowan* we find *suggest* with the meaning of ‘persuade’, mostly as translations of Latin *suadere* and *suggerere*. A typical example is the following.

- (2) Ðe hālig gāst gitriōweð iōwih alle ða ðe swa hwæt ic cweðo iōw *spiritus sanctus suggeret vobis omnia quaecumque dixero vobis*, Jn. Skt. Rush. 14, 26.
(Bosworth and Toller 1898: 460)
‘The holy spirit will teach (“prompt”) you all things, whatever I tell you.’

The same applies to the few cases where *læran* is found in the sense of ‘suggest, persuade’, although no example is given here where *læran* is actually translated or paraphrased as *suggest*. The verb *scyan* has the major meaning ‘prompt, urge’ and is also used as a translation of Latin *suadere* and *suggerere*. The verb *tyhtan* is, in its most important sense, explained as ‘draw the mind to something’ and ‘prompt, urge, persuade’. The same applies to *manian*. The relevant examples render a translation of Latin *suggerere*. In many cases the above verbs clearly show negative connotations.

- (3) Swā hwæt swā þurh unclænysse on þeáwum hit tiht (*se suggerit*). Hymn. Surt. 28,31.
(Bosworth and Toller 1898: 1028)
‘To whatever it draws the behaviour (“habits”) by uncleanness.’
- (4) Ða ærestan sýnne se weriga gāst scýde... Forðon mid ðý se weriga gāst ða sýnne scýfþ (...) on mōde. *primam culpam serpens suggessit... Cum enim malignus spiritus peccatum suggerit in mente*. Bd. I, 27; S. 497, 14–20.
(Bosworth and Toller 1898: 846)

9. The Germanic Lexicon Project: http://www.ling.upenn.edu/~kurisuto/germanic/language_resources.html

10. It is quite interesting to note that the same search in the electronic version of *A Thesaurus of Old English* (Roberts and Kay 2000) revealed only two verbs, *tyhtan* and (*ge*)*manian*.

‘The first sin was prompted by the devil... Therefore (when) the devil insinuates sin to the heart..’

Both the negative connotations and the prevalent strong persuasive and hortative sense of the verbs indicate that the activity designated can hardly be seen as a suggestion as it is used in contemporary interaction.

In the entries where *advise* is used in the description of Old English verbs, the activity denoted by the verb is either linked to a public office or official position in society, or it is based on the authority of a teacher. In the first case, the typical verb is *gerædan*, and the typical persons involved in the respective activity are the councillors, that is, the *witan*.

- (5) Hē him tō gefeccean hēt his witan, þ hī him geræddon hwæt him be ðām sēlost ðūhte, oððe tō dōn[n]e wære. Lch. iii. 426, 12.

(Bosworth and Toller 1921: 390)

‘He called his councillors (“had his councillors brought to him”), that they might advise him what they thought most fitting in this matter or what ought to be done.’

Other persons who typically “advise” in this sense are kings, emperors and bishops. Here it is quite likely that the advice given will assume a binding force since the person holds a powerful position in society. If the advice given rests on the authority of a teacher, we find a similar situation. Here the associated verb *læran* (‘teach, instruct’) clearly shows the authoritative nature of the act.¹¹ With *læran* we find three examples of explicit performatives (which are paraphrased with *advise* in Bosworth and Toller). A typical example is the following extract from *Boethius*.

- (6) Ic lære ðæt ðū fægenige oðerra manna gōdes and heora æðelo. *I advise that thou rejoice in other men’s good and their nobility*, Bt. 30, 1; Fox 108, 31.

(Bosworth and Toller 1898: 22)

Here, as in the other examples, it is quite likely that the context transforms the advice given to a lesson taught and that there is not much choice left to the “pupil”, who has to follow Wisdom’s instructions. Whatever the illocutionary force of the speech act, there is probably not much left which might qualify it as a suggestion. In all, the relevant Old English verbs in Bosworth and Toller seem to designate an activity associated with a privileged position in society or the status of a distinguished teacher, not with a polite strategy of communication.

This corroborates the findings in the *Helsinki Corpus* and adds weight to the claim that in Old English the inventory of speech-act verbs designating suggestions or proposals is very limited and, consequently, performative uses of directives involving suggestions were extremely rare. Thus we may conclude that Anglo-Saxon speakers quite

11. The same applies to examples with *(ge)manian*.

often used directive performatives which today would appear mostly inappropriate, whereas “face-saving” performatives seem to have been uncommon.

3.2 Constructions with *þu scealt / ge sculon*

Constructions with a second-person pronoun plus *scealt / sculon* in directive speech acts are less frequent and more restricted in the *Helsinki Corpus* than the directive performatives. In all, I found 26 relevant examples of *þu scealt* (0.6 in 10,000 words in the Old English part of the *Helsinki Corpus*) and 24 relevant examples of *ge sculon* (0.6 in 10,000 words in the Old English part of the *Helsinki Corpus*; see Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1. *þu scealt*-constructions in directives in the Old English section of the *Helsinki Corpus*.¹²

text type	words	incidence	frequency
handbook/philosophy	43,190	12 (46%)	2.78
verse	78,220	14 (54%)	1.79

Table 2. *ge sculon*-constructions in directives in the Old English section of the *Helsinki Corpus*.¹³

text type	words	incidence	frequency
religious instruction	86,220	23 (96%)	2.67
Bible	57,020	1 (4%)	0.18

It seems that constructions of this kind are also common in other functions. They are used as announcements, threats, logical conclusions or simply to designate a future event.

- (7) Gif ðu þonne þæt ne dest, ac forswugast hit and nelt folce his þearfe gecyðan,
þonne **scealt ðu** ealra þæra sawla on domesdæg gescead agyldan.
(*Helsinki Corpus*, Ælfric, *Rule of Polity*, 107)
‘If you (then) do not do it but suppress it and (if you) do not want to tell people their duty, then you will have to render an account for all the souls on doomsday.’

In (7) the author points out a future consequence for the addressee if he does not follow the rules pointed out in the preceding section. This is clearly a representative act,

12. Text types or text prototypes not listed in the table do not contain any examples.

13. Text types or text prototypes not listed in the table do not contain any examples.

or even a threat. In the present analysis only those items were included which unambiguously qualified as directives.

The items with *þu scealt* belong to the categories handbook / philosophy and verse, whereas the examples with *ge sculon* stem from the religious treatises of Ælfric and the Bible. The examples of *þu scealt* are all used in a situation where the addressor is in a superior position, for example, God addressing a human being (8), a saint addressing a demon (9)¹⁴, or the specialist giving instructions to the reader in a handbook (10).

- (8) þa him cirebaldum cininga wuldor, meotud mancynnes, modhord onleac, weoruda drihten, ond þus wordum cwæð: **ðu scealt** feran ond frið lædan, siðe gesecan, þær sylfætan eard weardigað, eðel healdap morðorcraeftum.
(Helsinki Corpus, *Andreas*, 169)
‘Then the Glory of kings, the Master of mankind, the Lord of hosts, opened his heart and spoke thus in words to him: Thou shalt go and bear thy life, seek out in a journey a place where cannibals inhabit the land, guard the country by murders.’ (Gordon 1954: 184)
- (9) Him seo halge oncwæð þurh gæstes giefe, Iuliana: **þu scealt** furþor gen, feond moncynnes, siþfæt secgan, hwa þec sende to me. ...
ða gen seo halge ongon hæleþa gewinnan, wrohtes wyrhtan, wordum frignan, fyrnsynna fruman: **þu** me furþor **scealt** secgan, sawla feond, hu þu soðfæstum þurh synna slide swiþpast sceþþe, facne bifongen. (Helsinki Corpus, *Juliana*, 122–123)
‘The holy Juliana answered him by the grace of the spirit: “Foe of mankind, still further shalt thou declare thy errand, and who sent thee to me.” ... Then still the saint questioned with words the foe of men, the worker of iniquity, the author of ancient sins: “Enemy of souls, thou shalt tell me further, how thou, encompassed with wickedness, dost most hurt the righteous by their falling into sins.”’ (Gordon 1954: 170–171)
- (10) þa men **þu scealt** smerwan mid þy ele þe mon wermod on seoðe & þa þiccan geurnen on & þa slipinga wætan on þam magan & þa acolodan & þæt ofstandene þicce slipige horh **þu scealt** mid þam ær genemnedan læcedomum wyrman & þynnian.
(Helsinki Corpus, *Laecebook*, 194)
‘Those men thou shalt smear with the oil on which wormwood has been sodden. And the thick coagulated and the viscid humours in the maw, and the chilled humours, and the intractable thick viscid foulness, thou shalt warm and thin with the afore named leechdoms.’ (Cockayne 1865: 195)

The addressors in the above examples present their requests in a plain and straightforward way. The obligation is just stated and no further comment seems necessary.

14. In one example St. Andrew, when working a miracle, addresses a stone (as if it were a human being).

Clearly, God and St. Juliana (and also the expert on medicinal recipes) hold a superior position and there is no need for redressive action. Or was there no need for any kind of “face work” anyway? Against this background, the restrictions in terms of text type are noteworthy. The examples found are either fictional examples stemming from or adapted to a Germanic context (in the verse texts) or examples in non-religious instruction. Thus, the data from the *Helsinki Corpus* suggest that this rather direct and straightforward formulation of directives is limited to the secular and / or Germanic world. Can this be taken to reflect interaction in secular Anglo-Saxon England? This point will be resumed below.

The data showing plural constructions is very difficult to account for, with 96 per cent of the examples stemming from one author, Ælfric. Ælfric’s treatises typically address priests, not laypeople, and deal, among other things, with the priest’s duties and obligations, directions for the order of mass etc. (see example 11).

- (11) Mid þam haligan ele **ge scylan** þa hæþenan cild mearcian on þam breoste and betwux þæm gesculdru on middewardan mid rode tacne, ærþanþe ge hit fullian on þam fantwætere. <R 6> And þonne hit of þæm wætere cymð, **ge scylan** wyrcan rode tacen upp on þam heafde mid þam haligan crisman. <R 7> On þam haligan fante, ærþanþe ge hy fullian, **ge scylon** don crisman on Cristes rode tacne.

(Helsinki Corpus, Ælfric, *Letters to Wulfstan*, 148)

‘You are to anoint (“mark”) the heathen child with the holy oil on the breast and in the middle between the shoulders with the sign of the cross, before you baptise it with the baptismal water. And when it comes out of the water, you are to make the sign of the cross on the head with the chrism. Before you baptise them, you are to pour chrism on the holy (baptismal) font with the sign of Christ’s cross.’

Clearly, the data must be attributed to the special style of one author. If we assume that the forms reflect an idiosyncrasy of one author, this would suggest that plural constructions with the modal *sculan* are extremely rare in Old English.

3.3 Constructions with *uton*

Constructions with *uton* plus infinitive are usually paraphrased with *let’s* (see Mitchell 1985: 384–385; Bosworth and Toller 1898 s.v. *witon*). The frequency and distribution of constructions with *uton* in the *Helsinki Corpus* is shown in table 3. Both in terms of frequency and distribution, these constructions seem to be situated halfway between the explicit performatives and the constructions with *scealt* and *sculon*. They are less frequent than the explicit performatives (90 examples, with a frequency of 2.2 in 10,000 words in the Old English part of the *Helsinki Corpus*, as opposed to a frequency of four with the performatives); but they are more common than *sceal* / *sculon* (with a frequency of 0.6 each in the Old English part of the *Helsinki Corpus*). They occur in fewer text

types than the performatives (six text types, with only three text types containing more than ten examples), but they are not as restricted as the *scealt / sculon* constructions.

Table 3. *uton*-constructions in directives in the Old English section of the *Helsinki Corpus*.¹⁵

text type	words	incidence	frequency
religious instruction	86,220	55 (61.1%)	6.38
Bible	57,020	11 (12.2%)	1.93
handbook/philosophy	43,190	8 (8.9%)	1.85
laws	17,140	3 (3.3%)	1.75
verse	78,220	12 (13.3%)	1.53
saints' lives	34,370	1 (1.1%)	0.29

Although not all of the examples include a first person plural pronoun (like *uton we* in example 12 below), most of them have a *we* in the following subordinate clause (see example 13 below). In most, if not all, of these cases this must be taken as an explicit reference to both addressor and addressee. Thus, against the background of Present-day English, these formulations of directives can be seen as strategies of positive politeness (Brown and Levinson 1987: 127).¹⁶

Most of the items, that is, 61 per cent of the examples occur in religious instruction. A closer look at the individual examples reveals that virtually all constructions are in fact associated with typical directives of religious instruction. In the texts of religious instruction proper they refer to the conduct of life according to Christian standards, to prayer, love of God etc.

- (12) **Uton** we þonne þæs geþencean, þa hwile þe we magon and moton, þæt we us georne to gode þydon. **Uton** urum Drihtne hyran georne, & him þancas secggan ealra his geofena, & ealra his miltsa. (Helsinki Corpus, *Blickling Homilies*, 115)
 ‘Let us then be mindful of this, while we can and may, that we may diligently strive for good things. Let us diligently obey our Lord and give thanks to him for all his gifts and all his mercies.’
- (13) And **utan** ðurh æghwæt Godes willan wyrcan swa we geornost magan. (Helsinki Corpus, Wulfstan, *Homilies*, 184)
 ‘And let us in every way perform God’s commands as carefully as we may be able to.’

15. Text types or prototypical text types not listed in the table do not contain any examples.

16. In her study on modes of address in Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints* homilies, Waterhouse points out a “directive” use of *we*, with which “Ælfric seeks to soften a virtual command” (1982: 24). On the use of *uton*, *we* and *us* in Wulfstan, which may effect “a union between speaker and audience,” see Green (1995: 114-117).

In the other text types as well, especially in verse texts and laws, *uton*-constructions typically include requests to love God, to keep peace, to pray and adore God, to seek heaven etc. (see examples 14, 15 and 16). Such *uton*-directives typically occur at the end of sections or at the end of the texts.

- (14) **Uton** we hycgan hwær we ham agen, ond þonne geþencan hu we þider cumen. (Helsinki Corpus, *The Seafarer*, 146)
 ‘Let us consider where we (may) have our home, and then think how we may get there.’
- (15) Ah **utu** we þe geornor to gode cleopigan, sendan usse bene on þa beorhtan gesceaft, þæt we þæs botles brucan motan, hames in hehðo.
 (Helsinki Corpus, *Fates of the Apostles*, 54)
 ‘But let us the more earnestly call unto God, send our prayers to shining heaven, that we may enjoy that mansion, a home on high.’ (Gordon 1954: 180)
- (16) Ealle we scylan ænne God lufian & weorðian & ælcne hæðdendom mid ealle aweorpan. & **utan** ænne cynehlaford holdlice healdan & lif & land samod ealle werian. (Helsinki Corpus, *Laws, 11th century*, 245–246)
 ‘We all have to love and honour one God and utterly reject any heathenism. And let us faithfully keep to one king and together defend (our) life and territory.’

Altogether, there are only eleven items left which are clearly non-religious and which stem from a (more or less) secular context. These are three examples from *Beowulf*, five items stemming from Byrhtferth’s *Enchiridion* and three examples from *Boethius*.

The excerpts from *Beowulf* typically comprise appeals to a warrior or warriors to set off and fight. In (17) Wiglaf addresses his men, in (18) Beowulf Hrothgar.

- (17) Nu is se dæg cumen þæt ure mandryhten mægenes behofað, godra guðrinca; **wutun** gongan to, helpan hildfruman, þenden hyt sy, glegegesa grim.
 (Helsinki Corpus, *Beowulf*, 82)
 ‘Now the day has come when our lord needs the strength of valiant warriors. Let us go to help our warlike prince, while the fierce dread flame yet flares.’ (Gordon 1954: 53)
- (18) Aris, rices weard, **uton** raþe feran Grendles magan gang sceawigan.
 (Helsinki Corpus, *Beowulf*, 43)
 ‘Rise up, guardian of the realm; let us go quickly hence to behold the track of Grendel’s kinswoman.’ (Gordon 1954: 29)

Quite interestingly, the examples from *Beowulf* do not contain any explicit reference to addressor and addressee, a typical feature of all the religious examples (see *we* in 12–16).

Thus, one could argue that in the excerpts from *Beowulf wutun / uton* are simply directive markers and not a kind of formulation which explicitly includes the addressor in the required act.

The five examples from Byrhtferth's *Enchiridion* and the three items from *Boethius* typically serve a meta-communicative function, guiding the reader through the different steps in a line of reasoning or announcing upcoming topics (see 19–21).

- (19) **Vton** nu gleawlice swyðe geseon hwanon ærest arison þa regulares, þe man hæst feriarum. (Helsinki Corpus, Byrhtferth, 50)
 ‘Now let us very diligently see where the regulars called “ferial” first came from.’ (Baker and Lapidge 1995: 35)
- (20) **Vton** nu heræfter sceortlice sprecaþ ymbe Maium. (Helsinki Corpus, Byrhtferth, 86)
 ‘Let us now speak briefly of May.’ (Baker and Lapidge 1995: 75)
- (21) ða cwæð he: **Uton** lætan þonne bion þa spræce, & bion unc ðæs orsorge, nu ðu swa fullice ongiten hæfst þætte God simle bið. (Helsinki Corpus, Boethius, 88)
 ‘Then he said: Let’s leave this issue now and be unconcerned about it since you have now so fully realised that God is eternal.’

Apart from these examples, the data from the *Helsinki Corpus* suggest that *uton*-constructions were mainly associated with religious discourse. 79 out of 90 items, that is 88 per cent, belong to religious instruction. If we remember that Byrhtferth, the author of the *Enchiridion*, was a monk addressing other monks or clerics, and that *Boethius* deals basically with God and providence, it is only the three examples from *Beowulf* which are clearly secular in nature. But these items do not contain any explicit reference to addressor and addressee and thus may not unambiguously qualify as “polite” common-ground strategies.

It is interesting to note that the situation with *uton* provides a sharp contrast to the distribution of the constructions containing *scealt / sculon*. The latter yielded either fictional examples stemming from, or adapted to, a Germanic context, or examples in non-religious instruction. With *uton* we find scarcely any clear secular examples. Thus it seems that the more “polite” *uton*-constructions are typical of religious instruction, whereas the more direct constructions involving the (singular) modal reflect a secular and / or Germanic background. We could even tentatively conclude that within a secular and / or Germanic world conventional indirectness does not seem to have been common.

3.4 Constructions with *neodþearf*

The fourth construction which was analysed contains a combination of *neodþearf* or *þearf* plus a first or second person pronoun.¹⁷ Such constructions often state an “objective” moral obligation, necessity or duty and are fairly often used in Old English homilies and sermons in the *Helsinki Corpus* (Kohnen 2007).

- (22) **Ac us is mycel neodþearf**, þæt we geþencan, hu drihten us mid his þrowunge alysde fram deofles anwealde. (*Helsinki Corpus, A Homily for the Sixth Sunday*)
 ‘But we have great need (“there is great need for us”) to consider how the Lord delivered us by his suffering from the devil’s power.’
- (23) **Forþon we habbaþ nedþearfe** þæt we ongyton þa blindnesse ure ælþeodignesse. (*Helsinki Corpus, Blickling Homilies*)
 ‘Therefore we have need to recognise the blindness of our pilgrimage.’

Here one could argue that the immediacy and threat of the directive is softened because the required act is presented as an inevitable necessity. In addition, in examples (22) and (23) both addressee and addressor are seen as being involved in the act.

All the prose texts of the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus* were searched (for a more detailed account see Kohnen 2006). 155 relevant examples were found, 110 of which (= 71 per cent) belong to homilies / sermons. Among the remaining 45 items 32 can be assigned to other kinds of religious instruction (for example, penitentials, rules etc.). Thus 92 per cent of the *neodþearf* items belong to religious instruction. The other 13 examples occur in laws and handbooks. So it seems that in Old English prose texts directives stating some objective necessity are mostly found in pieces of religious instruction.

Most of the *neodþearf* constructions analysed contain either a first or second person pronoun. The use of a first-person pronoun usually suggests the inclusion of the addressor and may thus be seen as a common-ground strategy (see examples 22 and 23 above). Quite interestingly, 62 per cent of the sermons / homilies showed a first person pronoun. So here again it appears that Old English directives included in religious discourse are more “polite”.

4. Conclusions

What conclusions with regard to politeness can be drawn from the preliminary results shown above? The evidence of the performatives and the associated inventory of speech-act verbs suggest that at least negative politeness did not play a major role in

17. Here constructions with an expression denoting any human being or Christian were also included. For a more detailed account of this construction and its distribution in Old English texts see Kohnen (2006).

Anglo-Saxon communication. The Anglo-Saxons used seemingly face-threatening performatives fairly often. On the other hand, those performatives which make the tentativeness of the addressor's intention explicit (*suggest*, *advise*) could not be found. In present-day English *suggest* / *advise* performatives are typically used as strategies of negative politeness to mitigate the face threats of speech acts. This kind of conventionalised indirectness does not seem to have been a typical feature of Anglo-Saxon interaction. The fact that directive performatives were found in a fairly broad range of different text types implies that this situation may be characteristic of the whole of Old English.

There is an almost complementary distribution of the other manifestations of directives across the text types: the rather direct or authoritarian manifestations (*þu scealt*) are almost exclusively found in a secular or Germanic context, whereas the common-ground strategies involving *uton* and the *neodþearf* constructions with an inclusive first-person pronoun typically appear in religious prose. The *þu scealt* constructions would confirm the picture suggested by the performative verbs. For an addressor in a superior position there is no need for face work with regard to the subordinate addressee. However, one should note that the number of items found in the data is rather small.

The more numerous examples of common-ground strategies, which seem to be typical of religious instruction, suggest a different pattern of communication. It seems that in the sphere of religious communication a basic view prevails which automatically includes the addressor (although he may be in a superior position) in the required act. However, this need not necessarily be interpreted as a strategy of positive politeness. Against a purely Christian background, it could simply reflect the basic monastic and Christian models of *humilitas* and *oboedientia*, major elements of the Benedictine Rule.¹⁸ In the monastic world of humility and obedience there are (or there should be) only limited face wants since Christians are not allowed to assume a rank above their fellow Christians, and everybody is bound to follow the requirements of a Christian life. So, against the background of monastic or Christian solidarity and obedience the inclusive *we* found in so many directives of religious instruction may in fact be taken literally. It should be noted that this Christian setting would also cover strategies which are normally seen as instances of negative politeness. The restricted face wants imply that you do not impose on your neighbour but rather humble yourself. One way of doing this is to follow what we would see today as typical strategies of negative politeness. This would account for some "modal" manifestations of directives (for example, *Ic wolde þæt þu me sædest* 'I would like you to tell me'), which are

18. See, for example, the central sections of the Benedictine Rule devoted to them (chapters V and VII) in Woelfflin (1895).

occasionally found in religious and / or Latin-based texts but, as far as I can see, never in writings which stem from a Germanic background.¹⁹

If these tentative conclusions could be corroborated, then the world of Anglo-Saxon directives, both religious and secular, would turn out to be a world beyond politeness or at least restricted to some positive politeness.²⁰ Thus, I suggest that the choice of directives is – in many cases – not determined by face work. Instead, the manifestations serve other purposes. For example, performatives were employed in order to give an exact specification of the speech act involved (an important matter in oral societies), or to insure the correct performance and the validity of the act (e.g. in laws). Other manifestations were used to emphasise the urgency or necessity of the required act, or to specify exactly to whom it applies. Thus, in (24) Wulfstan expresses his serious concern, and in (25) the explicit ordering of a law by the king and his councillors ensured its validity.

- (24) Ac ic **bidde** for Godes lufan and eac eornostlice **beode**, þæt man þæs geswice. Læwedum men is ælc wif forboden, butan his rihtæwe.

(Helsinki Corpus, Wulfstan, *Rule of Polity*, 113)

‘And I ask for God’s love and demand (this) with great concern that people avoid this. Laymen are not allowed to have (intercourse with) any woman, except their lawful (wife).’

- (25) Ærest we **bebeodað**, þætte Godes ðeowas hiora ryhtregol on ryht healdan. Æfter þam we **bebeodað**, þætte ealles folces æw & domas ðus sien gehealdene.

(Helsinki Corpus, *Ine’s Laws*, 88)

‘First we order that God’s servants keep their rule correctly. After that we order that all marriages and judgements of (“with regard to”) all people are to be kept.’

Such an interpretation would accord with some recent studies which locate the development of strategies of negative politeness only in the Early Modern period (for example, Kopytko 1995; with regard to directives see Kohnen 2002).

However, one has to keep in mind that this study is fragmentary, focussing only on four manifestations of directives and relying in many (but not all!) cases on the possibly restricted data of the *Helsinki Corpus*. This limitation cannot be denied and the conclusions reached in this study should be supported by further investigations including more manifestations and covering larger corpora.

On the other hand, the present study has also shown that the *Helsinki Corpus* is fairly reliable. The lack of performative *suggest* / *advise* verbs was confirmed on the basis of the substantial data base provided by Bosworth and Toller. And the high

19. These and other “modal” constructions certainly deserve a separate study. In many cases they may simply be a literal translation of a Latin original (with *ic wolde* representing Latin *vellem* or *velim*).

20. We could expect positive politeness in the secular sphere.

frequency of *neodþearf*-constructions in religious discourse could be shown to apply to all Old English prose texts. It is true that in some cases (especially with *þu scealt*) the number of examples found in the *Helsinki Corpus* is rather small. However, here it is not the number of items per se, but the almost complementary distribution across secular and religious text types that seems to provide rather reliable evidence. In fact, this particular divide between the secular and the religious has been found relevant in another study on Old English address terms, which used the complete *DOEC* as data (see Kohnen 2008), with similar consequences for the assessment of politeness. Address terms in the secular world reflect the basic structure of a Germanic society, whereas in the religious world address terms follow the ideals of Christian *humilitas* and *caritas*. In both the secular and the religious domain one might doubt whether the application of the respective address terms could be linked to politeness in the modern sense of the word. So, despite all the qualifications with regard to the present study, the world of Anglo-Saxon directives might after all turn out to be a world beyond politeness. What consequences this implies and what differing constitutive parts a concept of face might have in such a world must be left to a more comprehensive separate study of Anglo-Saxon pragmatics.

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Requests and directness in Early Modern English trial proceedings and play texts, 1640–1760

Jonathan Culpeper and Dawn Archer

1. Introduction

Historical (or diachronic) speech act analysis has been gathering momentum in recent years (e.g. Arnovick 1999; Culpeper and Semino 2000; Jucker and Taavitsainen 2000; Taavitsainen and Jucker 2007; Kohnen 2000a, 2000b, 2002b, 2004; Archer 2005). In this paper, we intend to extend this work further by exploring how English requests, from the period 1640–1760, vary in two historical text types: trial proceedings and play texts. We will also compare our findings with present-day studies. Our aim is to contribute both to knowledge about the English language and to theoretical discussions regarding the nature of speech acts, particularly conventional indirect speech acts. It should be noted at this early point that our understanding of the term “request” is similar to Searle’s term “directives” (see also Blum-Kulka et al. 1989a; Aijmer 1996). That is to say, it includes both “commands” and “requests” (which can be distinguished by appealing to the power differential between the interlocutors: see Searle 1969: 66).¹

Studies that focus on specific speech acts account for a large proportion of the scholarly output of synchronic cross-cultural pragmatics. Moreover, requests are a particularly well-studied speech act in this field, and are often related to a scale of directness, with different degrees of directness being correlated with various situations and “cultures”. Key work here includes the *Cross-cultural Speech Act Realization Project* (CCSARP) (see, in particular, Blum-Kulka et al. 1989a). Given that the CCSARP was designed for application across languages and cultures, one might expect that it can also be straightforwardly applied to historical contexts. However, it is worth remembering that, even in synchronic work, every step of the enterprise is fraught with difficulties. Indeed, one must attend to issues such as the following: How are speech acts and, specifically, requests to be defined and identified? What does it mean to be “direct”

1. That said, our usage of the label “request” does not include questions (i.e. directions to give information) as, like Leech (1983), we believe they should be treated separately, as “rogatives”. In practice, then, we are investigating impossitives, but do not use that term here, as it is currently used in the literature (e.g. Blum-Kulka 1987) to refer to the most direct of requests (see section 3.2).

or “indirect”? With what does (in)directness correlate? What constitutes a situation or, more problematically, a culture?

As is well known, particular methodological and theoretical difficulties also attend historical speech act analysis (see Bertuccelli Papi 2000 and Kohnen 2002a, for useful overviews; see also Jucker and Taavitsainen 2000: 68–70). For example, the CC-SARP is based on data obtained from written questionnaires (discourse completion tasks) administered to informants – something that obviously cannot be done for the past. We will elaborate on these difficulties in section 4. Our study is primarily a “function to form” study (cf. Jacobs and Jucker 1995), that is to say, our starting point is to identify requestive functions and then to consider the pragmalinguistic strategies associated with them. We will draw inspiration from Blum-Kulka et al.’s (1989a) analysis and discussion of requests, and also test some of their more general claims. The specific, empirically-oriented questions we will address include the following:

1. Blum-Kulka (1989) claims universality for three broad categories of (in)directness, namely, impositives, conventional indirectness and hints. Does our historical study lend support to this claim?
2. Blum-Kulka (1989) shows that conventional indirectness is the most frequent strategy in all the languages considered in the CCSARP. Does our historical study lend support to this?
3. What strategies realise conventional indirectness in our data, and what are their contexts?
4. What strategies realise impositives in our data, and what are their contexts?

In addressing these questions, we will also tackle a number of theoretical and methodological issues.

The next section of our paper takes some steps towards defining the speech act of requests and considers the possible structural features of requests (notably via the CC-SARP classification scheme). In section 3, we air the topic of (in)directness, and the ways in which it has been approached. In section 4, we discuss methodological problems regarding the speech act analysis of historical data, and itemise types of request that do not easily match definitions and examples given in the literature. Section 5 contains a brief outline of our own data and the corpus-based methodology we deployed to facilitate our analysis. Sections 6 to 8 contain our analyses, which focus on broad categories of directness, strategies of conventional indirectness, and strategies of impositives as well as their support moves. Our final two sections include a summary and discussion of our results, and consideration of their implications.

2. Requests

2.1 Towards a definition of the speech act of request

We view speech acts as fuzzy, complex concepts that can vary both synchronically and diachronically across multiple dimensions in the “pragmatic space” that they share with neighbouring speech acts (in line with Jucker and Taavitsainen 2000: 74, 92; see also Bertuccelli Papi 2000: 61). Such a conceptualisation accommodates both the indeterminacy and complexity of speech acts – something that more traditional accounts fail to do (cf. Leech 1983: 23–24). Jucker and Taavitsainen (2000: 74) also suggest that a prototype approach is required. We would endorse this, given that commands can blur into requests, which in turn can blur into suggestions, advice or offers, and so on. Indeed, prototype theory offers proper theoretical status to such gradience, and takes account of the complexity of criteria for category membership (see Coleman and Kay 1981, for an illustration of prototype theory applied to pragmatic phenomena).

We believe that Searle’s (1969: 66) felicity conditions provide a useful, though limited, starting point when seeking to outline the possible features that might contribute to the constitution of a request, and so present them here:

Propositional content	Future act A of H
Preparatory conditions	1. H is able to do A. S believes H is able to do A. 2. It is not obvious to both S and H that H will do A in the normal course of events of his own accord.
Sincerity condition	S wants H to do A
Essential condition	Counts as an attempt to get H to do A.

The above conditions do not encompass all the possible formal, co-textual and contextual features that can be associated with requests. Indeed, pulling together all possible relevant features mentioned in various literatures reveals the following:

Formal features

- Particular conventionalised pragmalinguistic strategies (or illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs)) (Searle 1975; Aijmer 1996: chapter 4).
- A future action is specified in some proposition (cf. Searle 1969).

Contextual beliefs

- It is not obvious that that future action will be performed by the target in the normal course of events (Searle 1969).

- It is not obvious that the target is obliged to perform the future action or the source is obliged to ask for the future action to be performed in the normal course of events (cf. Searle 1979: 126–130).²
- The target is able to undertake the future action (Searle 1969).
- The target is willing to undertake the future action (Gordon and Lakoff 1971).
- The source of the speech act wants the target to do the future act (Searle 1969; Bach and Harnish 1979: 48).
- The target takes the source's desire for the future act as the reason to act (Bach and Harnish 1979: 48).

Interpersonal beliefs

- The future action represents benefit for the source but cost for the target (Brown and Levinson 1987; Leech 1983: 104; Goffman 1971: 145; Emundson and House 1981: 56).
- The source is likely to be of relatively high status (Holtgraves 1994).

Co-textual features

- Source: Pre-request (Edmondson and House 1981; Levinson 1983: 356–64; Tsui 1994: 110–111).
- Target: Unmarked compliance / marked non-compliance (Tsui 1994: 112; Levinson 1983: 332–337, 356–364; Aijmer 1996: 142–144).

Outcomes (i.e. perlocutionary effects)

- Target performs the action specified in the earlier speech act (Austin 1962).

We would argue that more prototypical requests will be characterized by many, if not most, of the above features. However, what counts as prototypical will be dependent on culture and also period. We will elaborate on how these features might be structured and how they relate to speech act theory in section 3.1.

2.2 The structure of requests: A starting point

Given the popularity of the CCSARP coding scheme for requests and the fact that it is designed to work across different languages and contexts, it seems ideal as a starting point for our work. Yet, as will become clear, it turned out not to be particularly well-suited to the description of our data. This is one of the most important findings of our paper.

2. Searle does not actually state this as a felicity condition. However, his discussion (relating to imperatives) makes it clear that their successful performance depends upon obligations relevant to the specific context of use. There is also a hint that at least some of these obligations have an institutional basis (1979: 127).

2.2.1 *Distinguishing the structural categories of a request*

The example below illustrates the three major structural categories of a request according to Blum-Kulka et al. (1989a), that is to say, the “head act”, “alerter” and “support move” (square brackets distinguish these categories):

Mrs. DOTTEREL. [Looke, *Mr. Daffodil*], [you must curb your Passions, and keep your Distance] – [Fire is catching, and one does not know the Consequences when once it begins to spread].

David Garrick, *The Male-Coquette*, 1757

The head act here is “you must curb your Passions, and keep your Distance”³, as this equates to the “minimal unit which can realise a request” (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989a: CCSARP coding manual, p. 275); if the other elements of the request were removed, it would still have the potential to be understood as a request. “Looke, *Mr. Daffodil*” functions as the alerter, “whose function it is to alert the hearer’s attention to the ensuing speech act” (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989a: CCSARP coding manual, p. 277). “Fire is catching, and one does not know the Consequences when once it begins to spread” is the support move, and, more specifically, a “grounder”. Support moves can occur before or after the head act and their function is to mitigate or aggravate the request (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989a: CCSARP coding manual, p. 287). It is worth noting that, in some contexts, the presence of a support move (minus head act) can be enough to trigger the inference that a request is being performed.

2.2.2 *Features of the head act*

Head acts can vary in three ways, according to the work of Blum-Kulka and her colleagues. First, they can vary according to directness (we discuss this below, see section 3.1. and 3.2). Second, they can vary according to perspective. This is made obvious when the viewpoint of the participant(s) is explicitly mentioned (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989b: 17; Blum-Kulka et al. 1989a: CCSARP coding manual, p. 278; Aijmer 1996: 175–177). Compare, for example:

The hearer-oriented viewpoint – “you must curb your Passions, and keep your Distance”

3. In fact, in this particular case it has the appearance of a double-headed act. We treated closely coordinated head acts such as this, and ones which approximated to one semantic unit, as a single head act. See section 4.

The speaker-oriented viewpoint – “I ask you to curb your Passions, and keep your Distance”⁴

The inclusive viewpoint – “we must curb our Passions, and keep our Distance”

The impersonal viewpoint – “gentlemen must curb their Passions, and keep their Distance”

We do not have space to discuss viewpoint in this paper. Third, requests can vary according to whether they have internal modification. Like support moves, these optional elements function to downgrade or upgrade the force of the request. Unlike support moves, they must occur within the head act. Support moves are also “longer and more explicit in that they have their own propositional content and illocution” (Faerch and Kasper 1989: 244), and often assume their own turns. Nevertheless, despite these varying characteristics, the difference between support moves and internal modifiers is scalar rather than absolute (cf. Aijmer 1996: 170). Internal modifiers can include lexical/phrasal devices (e.g. politeness markers, hedges, downtoners, subjectivizers) or syntactic devices (e.g. interrogatives or conditional structures, negation, tense, aspect). Some examples are:

“prithee, curb your Passions, and keep your Distance” (politeness marker)

“it would be better if you curb your Passions, and keep your Distance” (hedge)

“will you not curb your Passions, and keep your Distance” (negation of preparatory condition)

“it would be better if you were to curb your Passions, and keep your Distance” (hedge + subjunctive)

The above elements can also occur in combination, of course (for more detail, see Blum-Kulka et al. 1989a: CCSARP coding manual, p. 281–286; and also Faerch and Kasper 1989).

4. *I* is the subject of the performative verb and thus one can argue that a speaker perspective for the head act is represented. Other examples containing both first and second person pronouns can be more ambiguous. Aijmer (1996: 175) gives the example of “I would be grateful if you could give me a call” to illustrate the difficulty in deciding whether the perspective is that of the speaker or hearer, and notes that some would describe this particular example as hearer-oriented. In the CCSARP scheme, the head act would be considered the conditional clause, hence providing an argument for a hearer-oriented perspective. However, the conditional clause is subordinate to the controlling main clause, which is clearly speaker-oriented. Kohnen (2002b) treats such cases as speaker-oriented in his historical work. Although there may be a case for describing some cases like this as “joint perspective”, we will also treat them as speaker-oriented.

3. (In)directness and requests

3.1 (In)directness: Some theoretical background

Searle (1975: 60) provides the classic definition of indirect speech acts: “cases in which one illocutionary act is performed indirectly by way of performing another”. Thus, the utterance “this could do with a little salt”, said at the dinner table, could be understood as a request to pass some salt performed indirectly by way of an assertion. However, there is little agreement on the status of direct/indirect speech acts or how indirect speech acts work (see Aijmer 1996: 126–128, for a brief overview), and some have even proposed that a scale of directness be dispensed with altogether (Wierzbicka 1991: 88). As an illustration of the controversy, consider the views articulated by Bertolet (1994) and Holdcroft (1994). Bertolet (1994) argues that indirect speech acts do not exist: rather, what is linguistically “there” is the literal form indicating the direct speech act (as such, an “indirect speech act” can only be an interpretation of a literal, direct speech act). Thus, “can you pass the salt?” is some kind of direct questioning speech act, as that is what is linguistically there in the literal interrogative form. Contrary to this, Holdcroft (1994) emphasises an inferential account of speech act identification, whereby an utterance without a context has no force at all. This means that (direct and indirect) speech acts can only function as speech acts when they are contextualised in some way. Thus, in “can you pass the salt?” the literal interrogative form cannot be read as a questioning speech act in itself, until it is contextualised. Our own position is closer to that of Holdcroft (1994) in that we believe speech acts always involve context. However, we acknowledge that some contextualised speech acts are (or become) conventionally or standardly associated with particular forms. Thus, “can you X” can be interpreted by default as a request. Note that this does not mean that such an interpretation is context-free (even the philosopher’s vacuum is a context of sorts!), but merely that the prime source of the interpretation is the semantics and that that interpretation is not cancelled by the context.

Interestingly, both Bertolet and Holdcroft cite – and go on to make broad but unsubstantiated quantitative statements about – a number of conventionalised pragmalinguistic strategies for performing speech acts. By way of illustration, Holdcroft (1994: 356) claims that there are “many counter-examples” to the hypothesis that the formal features of an utterance determine its illocutionary force without, however, providing any figures. We believe corpus methodology can make a useful contribution here, by identifying not only the examples that people actually use, but the frequency with which they use them, and, if annotation is employed, some aspects of the context in which they are used. This information can then be fed into the conceptualisation of the speech act, lending it more structure and detail than is suggested by the kind of list of characteristics given in section 2.1. Indeed, this will be one of the main outcomes of this paper.

As for how indirect speech acts work, Searle’s account (1975) is focused on the inferencing required to bridge the gap between the direct speech act and the indirect

speech act, and suggests the use of a framework such as Grice's Conversational Implicature (1975), coupled with shared background information. Thus, the claim is that the utterance "this could do with a little salt" would first be taken as a speech act of assertion, the direct speech act, which would flout the conversational maxims, and this, coupled with background knowledge (e.g. the bland food, the position of the salt relative to the speaker), would then lead to the computation of the indirect speech act of request. In this account, conventional indirect speech acts have a systematic relationship with the direct speech act's felicity conditions. Thus, an utterance such as "can you pass the salt?" orientates to the preparatory condition of the speaker having the ability to perform the act denoted in the request. Searle (1979: 73–74) spells out in detail the supposed inferential steps that we take when processing the request "can you pass the salt?". However, even to arrive at Step 1, "X has asked me the question as to whether I have the ability to pass the salt", the interpreter has already undertaken some inferencing, as s/he has inferred that the utterance counts as a "question" in this context and that they are the target of it. So, in fact, the first step is not the literal step – the literal interpretation of form – it is supposed to be. Consequently, like Holdcroft (1994), we believe that all speech acts involve an integration of both formal and contextual aspects.

Given that Searle's account emphasizes the interpretation of speech acts rather more than their linguistics, it makes sense to assess it in terms of psychological validity. Three particular and related questions can be addressed:

1. Are two speech acts entertained by the comprehender, first the direct one and then the indirect one?
2. In order to arrive at the indirect speech act, is the kind of Gricean inferencing outlined by Searle the only route?
3. Is it the case that orientation to felicity conditions is the basis for conventional indirect speech acts?

Answers to the first question are somewhat mixed. Clark and Lucy (1975), for example, seem to find evidence that the literal meaning is computed first and then the indirect meaning, but Gibbs (1983) found the contrary for certain types of indirect requests. Nevertheless, Holtgraves (1998: 80) states that "there does seem to be an emerging consensus that the literal reading of potentially indirect remarks need not be activated to comprehend a speaker's intended meaning" in the psycholinguistic literature (note that the wording here allows for occasions when they are activated). If the literal, direct meanings are not always activated, then already we have a challenge to the issue behind question 2 – that indirect speech acts involve Gricean inferencing, as there would be no deviation from the literal meaning of the utterance to account for. Some forms of indirect speech act, particularly requests, have developed conventional meanings which short-circuit the two-stage processing model implied by the Gricean

framework.⁵ An indication of this is that, in cases like “can you pass the salt”, the word “please” is frequently added; preverbal “please” creates grammatical difficulties if the utterance is taken as a question. More specifically, Holtgraves (1994) provides experimental evidence to suggest that Gricean-type inferencing is not required for conventional indirect requests (e.g. “can you pass the salt”), but is sometimes required by nonconventional indirect requests (e.g. “this could do with a little salt”). As for the final question, Holtgraves (2005) conducted a production experiment in order to assess the ways in which people perform “implicit performatives”, including indirect requests. He found good support for Searle’s proposal that indirect speech acts are performed by referencing the relevant felicity condition.⁶

That said, a further set of studies have suggested that Searle’s account is inadequate with respect to all of the three proposals which the above questions address. Holdcroft (1994: 360–361), from his more philosophical perspective, highlights the issue through an example:

Suppose that S is in a position of authority and that he has made it clear that he is going to give us instructions. In that case it would be much simpler to try to corroborate the hypothesis that S is requesting us to VP directly without going through Searle’s elaborate inference schema [...]. In other words the inferential process tries to corroborate the most likely hypothesis given the background assumptions, including crucially the conversational goals of the participants.

This idea is in tune with Levinson’s ([1979]1992) discussion of activity types: knowing the activity type of which an utterance is a part helps us to infer how that utterance should be taken (i.e. what the illocutionary point of the act is). More generally, the issue is that key interpersonal information is missing from Searle’s account. This information alone can trigger a requestive interpretation, circumventing the Gricean inference process. Holtgraves (1994), for example, found that knowing that the speaker was of high status was enough to prime a directive interpretation, in advance of any remark having been actually made (see also Ervin-Tripp et al. 1987 and Gibbs 1981, for the general importance of social context in speech act interpretation). Also, the processing

5. Rather than the term “conventional”, Bach and Harnish (1979) prefer the term “standardised” (see also Bach 1995). They see the notion of conventionalisation as a stronger account of the processes involved in indirect speech acts, whereby an utterance stands for a particular illocutionary force on the basis of a general mutual belief. The notion of standardisation is weaker in that it short-circuits some of the steps in the inference pattern, without eliminating them. The latter notion allows for the fact that the direct meaning is always potentially recoverable and that the speech act would be less than successful if any of the inference steps were blocked (see, in particular, Bach 1995: 681–685). We will continue to use the term conventional/conventionalisation, following the bulk of the literature, but our understanding of it is closer to that of Bach and Harnish (1979).

6. Additional evidence of this point can also be found in corpus-based studies. For example, the requestive strategies that Aijmer (1996: chapter 4) reveals largely orientate to felicity conditions.

of nonconventional requests was quite similar to that of conventional requests, when those nonconventional requests were made by high status speakers. This would suggest that speech act theory needs to bring on board social information if it is to account for the inferencing related to indirect speech acts. Indeed, we would go as far as to state that, given that indirect requests are largely motivated by interpersonal considerations, and even Searle (1975: 76) admits that politeness is a key motivating factor, it seems odd that such considerations have been so studiously ignored.

Interpersonal considerations will be an important aspect of our account of the historical data investigated in this study. We do not have space for a full consideration of alternative accounts to indirect speech acts. Some alternatives, such as Sperber and Wilson's (1995) relevance theory, do not explicitly incorporate social factors or account for what might motivate indirectness. However, an attractive proposal has been made by Thornburg and Panther (1997) and Panther and Thornburg (1998), and further developed by Pérez Hernández and Ruiz de Mendoza (2002). In their view, the identification of illocutionary force has its basis in conceptual metonymies, such that by uttering a component of an "illocutionary scenario" a speaker enables the hearer to retrieve the illocutionary meaning for which the component stands (i.e. it is metonymically linked). This, they plausibly claim, accounts for how indirect illocutions can be rapidly and efficiently retrieved by hearers. An illocutionary scenario is taken to be a generic knowledge organisation structure, and hence has strong similarities with the prototype view of speech acts outlined in section 2.1. Importantly, Pérez Hernández and Ruiz de Mendoza (2002) broaden the basis of illocutionary scenarios beyond Searle's felicity conditions to include interpersonal features. Specifically, they include the power relationship between the speakers, the cost/benefit to the speaker/hearer and the degree of optionality of the illocution, because of the role features such as these play in conceptualising and interpreting the illocutionary act.⁷ They also propose that part of the conceptual apparatus behind speech acts, specifically directive illocutions, concerns metaphorical correspondences between the illocutions and a "force image-schema". The idea is that a directive act metaphorically "forces" somebody to do something. They suggest that this also accounts for why we can talk about the "strength" of speech acts. We have a mapping of physical forces onto the forces of social interaction. Acting against speech act forces are various types of potential "obstacle", and it is these obstacles that metonymically stand in for a request.

Although there is no mention of it, there is an obvious connection between the work of Pérez Hernández and Ruiz de Mendoza (2002) and the Obstacle Hypothesis postulated in Gibbs (1986) (see also Francik and Clark 1985). The Obstacle Hypothesis holds that:

[...] speakers design their requests to best specify the projected reasons that the addressee is not complying with the requests. The use of indirect speech acts is not

7. The fact that these three features appear in Leech's (1983) model of politeness is not incidental.

strictly a matter of *convention*, since indirect requests appear to be “conventional” for a motivated reason. People learn to associate specific obstacles for hearers in different social situations and know which sentence forms best fit the circumstances. What makes some indirect speech acts apparently “conventional” is the appropriateness of the sentence forms in matching the obstacles present for addressees in a social context. (Gibbs 1986: 193)

Gibbs (1986) also provides evidence which suggests that indirect requests produced in this way are processed faster by listeners in determining their intended meanings. The outline of the metonymic account in the previous paragraph explains why this might be the case. All this is not to say that the obstacles put forward by speakers need be actually problematic for them. As Gibbs (1986: 194) points out, “[t]he mention of obstacles that are not problematic allows speakers to ingratiate themselves with their addressees”. In other words, the Obstacle Hypothesis does not compete with an interpersonal agenda (being polite, maintaining social distance, etc.), but is a mechanism by which it can be accomplished (Gibbs 1986: 194).

Finally, though diachronic issues are rarely mentioned in the speech act theory literature, there is agreement that conventional indirect requests were originally used literally and directly (Sadock 1974: 98; Bach and Harnish 1979: 193). By way of illustration, Bach and Harnish (1979: 193) state that: “only by accumulating precedent[s] for indirect use do such sentences come to be standardised, and their being standardised consists in whatever it takes for the SAS [speech act schema] to be short-circuited.” The corpus-based methodology should lend itself well to identifying and tracking “accumulating precedent”. Moreover, given changes in social context over the last four hundred or so years, one can hypothesize that the “obstacles” that speakers and hearers negotiate will have changed. We will be seeking to investigate this issue in the coming sections, by determining whether changes to conventional indirect requests reflect changes to what could constitute an “obstacle”.

3.2 Classifying requests for (in)directness: A starting point

In our analyses, we will start by following Blum-Kulka (1982, 1987, 1989; and particularly Blum-Kulka et al. 1985) and the CCSARP’s classification of the linguistic realizations of requests according to different degrees of directness. Blum-Kulka and her colleagues identified nine (in)directness strategy types. We give them in brief below (full details can be found in Blum-Kulka et al. 1989b: 18, and the CCSARP coding manual in Blum-Kulka et al. 1989a: 278–281)⁸:

Direct (impositives)

1. Mood derivable

8. Strategies four and five are not included in the description of the direct category in Blum-Kulka (1989: 46), but they are in Blum-Kulka et al. (1989a: 18), and Blum-Kulka and House (1989: 123).

2. Performatives
3. Hedged Performatives
4. Obligation statements
5. Want statements

Conventionally indirect

6. Suggestory formulae
7. Query preparatory

Nonconventionally indirect (hints)

8. Strong hints
9. Mild hints

Other things being equal, one might expect some correlation between these strategies and politeness (cf. Leech 1983). However, Blum-Kulka (1987) found that informants considered conventionally indirect strategies more polite, arguing that they represented a trade-off between the indirectness required to be polite and not overloading the target with inferential work. Needless to say, one cannot safely assume any particular correlation to apply to historical contexts. Indeed, as Blum-Kulka et al. (1989b: 24) point out, we need to test “the possibility that notions of politeness are culturally relativized, namely, that similar choices of directness levels, for example, carry culturally differentiated meanings for members of different cultures”. And we should not forget that directness is just one possible linguistic dimension affecting politeness; other important dimensions include both internal and external modification (Blum-Kulka 1990: 270).

4. Historical methodology: Problems, solutions and implications

It is worth noting, at this point, that requestive strategy taxonomies vary wildly in the number of strategies they propose for modern data (even before they are applied to historical data). Aijmer (1996: 132–133), for example, identifies 18. We cannot assume, therefore, that any set of strategies “fit” our historical data. In addition, the term “direct” in Blum-Kulka’s work does not have the sense that Searle intended for it. If that were so, “obligation statements” (e.g. “you must go now”) and “want statements” (e.g. “I want you to go now”) would be considered indirect, as they are statements or assertions doing the job of requests (see also section 6.2). Instead, “directness” seems to refer to the explicitness with which the illocutionary point is signaled by the utterance, and complex processes of conventionalization or standardization feed that explicitness. Indeed, Blum-Kulka and House (1989: 133) refer to indirectness as “a measure of illocutionary transparency”.

Jucker and Taavitsainen (2000: 69–70) identify further methodological difficulties specific to the historical study of speech acts:

1. tracking linguistic realisations of particular speech act functions across time has the problem that what counts as a particular speech act function may have changed as well;
2. speech acts are vague or ambiguous as to what their illocutionary forces are; and
3. a precise description of a particular speech act must be done in relation to adjacent speech acts (cf. the notion of “pragmatic space” above).

Whilst these are all genuine difficulties, they are not sufficiently grave to force the enterprise to be abandoned. By way of illustration, we would argue that a shift in speech act function may not be as problematic for directives as it is for other illocutionary functions. Indeed, Kohonen (2002a) makes the assumption that the directive function “remained stable throughout the history of English”, though provides no justification. In contrast, speech acts with a central expressive or socio-psychological illocutionary focus, such as apologies, complaints and compliments, have been shown to be strongly sensitive to cultural variation (see, for example, Goddard and Wierzbicka 1997). Requests, in the sense of Leech’s (1983) impositives, do have important socio-psychological characteristics, but nonetheless have a more central “transactional” illocutionary focus: their illocutionary point is getting somebody to do something, not simply expressing an internal state in reaction to a particular state of affairs. Moreover, they are pervasive (much more frequent than, for example, apologies), and are grammaticalized as the imperative mood in the syntax of many languages. All this suggests that their function is relatively stable. Regarding vagueness and ambiguity, it should be remembered that communication is successful, by and large. This must mean that interlocutors manage to ascribe pragmatic functions to what they hear, and act accordingly. The key point for the analyst, then, is to accommodate vagueness and ambiguity in their theoretical and methodological models, just as we tried to do in section 2.1, using prototype theory.

Historical pragmatics shares some of the methodological problems of corpus-based pragmatics research by which we mean pragmatics studies using the corpus methodology have tended to use form as a point of entry (e.g. Aijmer 1996; Stenström 1994). In most cases, this equates to producing a list of lexical items and phrases with pragmatic import on the basis of the literature and readings of the corpus, searching the entire corpus for instances of each item and then examining the context of the retrieved instances. Kohonen (2002a: 238), discussing corpus-based historical pragmatics and directives in particular, believes that, whilst “corpus searches must be based on forms rather than functions”, the approach creates its own problems, not least, the difficulties of devising a “*comprehensive list of all the typical manifestations of directive speech acts for all periods of the English language*” (our italics). Kohonen suggests two

ways forward at this point: (1) we restrict ourselves to an “eclectic illustration of the speech act under consideration” (this is termed “illustrative eclecticism”), or (2) we “base our analysis on a deliberate selection of typical patterns which we trace by way of a representative analysis throughout the history of English” (this is termed “structured eclecticism”). A particular problem with the second approach, Kohnen points out (2002a: 240–241), is the lack of clarity about how the particular manifestations of directives found in the corpus might relate to the underlying total number of directives. One cannot be sure, for example, whether the increase or decrease of a particular form is counterbalanced by changes in the frequency of another form, or simply relates to changes in the use of directives as a whole. Kohnen (2002a: 240) suggests that the only solution is to analyze comparable text types and make the assumption that these text types have a more or less stable functional profile – an assumption that we think is by no means certain. An alternative route, and one that we have taken, is to add annotation to the corpus indicating that a request has taken place and also what kind of request it is (see Archer and Culpeper 2003 for general details of this methodology, and Archer 2005 for an illustration, as applied to questioning functions). As the annotation must be added manually, this has the downside of being labour-intensive and liable to both error and interpretative subjectivity, though there are procedures that can help reduce these problems.

The important first step for our project, then, is to identify requests. This is not straightforward. As we have already noted, there is no simple correspondence between form and speech act function. Indeed, we are also interested in requests that take the form of hints, and thus would have no formal traces at all. In any case, a focus on form would lead to the danger of circularity, given that we are interested in the kinds of pragmalinguistic strategies used to achieve particular speech acts. There is also the problem that we cannot rely on native speaker intuition, as was the case with the CC-SARP. Historical studies are subject to particular difficulties of interpretation relating to semantic and syntactic changes. These can lead to what Kohnen (2002a: 239) usefully terms “*pragmatic false friends*, i.e. constructions which, against a contemporary background, suggest a wrong pragmatic interpretation” (Kohnen exemplifies with modal verbs). Some of these problems can be managed by taking the kind of multi-feature view of speech acts, as outlined in section 2.1. Indeed, our identification of requests was geared towards finding those segments of the discourse that reflect as many prototypical requestive features as possible. That said, it is worth noting that the requestive characteristics listed in section 2.1 are not equally reliable in the identification of requests. For example, the willingness or otherwise of a participant is a mental state that often lacks tangible linguistic evidence; in contrast, compliance is exhibited in talk or behaviour.⁹ Generally, we privileged co-textual features as a relatively good source of evidence about whether a request had taken place, and also outcomes – what Austin

9. If compliance/non-compliance was not given immediately and/or not given at all, other features would need to be identifiable for it to be classified as a request.

(1962) would think of as perlocutionary effects. Similarly, we took account of metalinguistic or metapragmatic comments (made by the target or others) indicating a request had taken place. Associated contextual beliefs were also taken into account, but given somewhat less weight, as the evidence is more indirect: for example, hedging and politeness markers may suggest that the source of the speech act believes that the future action is not good for the target. Finally, as it can be difficult to avoid being drawn, perhaps unconsciously, to segments of text with recognizable requestive forms, we have sought to ensure that no request has been identified on the basis of the form alone. We have also cross-checked our request identification results with each other, starting with a very inclusive policy and then refining the dataset in subsequent rounds, and labeled more marginal cases as “indeterminate” or “problematic”.

Aside from the specific complexities of particular cases, the refinement of our set of requests required making general decisions about what to include and what not to include. Difficulties that we encountered, often leading to exclusion, included the following:

- A significant proportion of requestive segments – 25.2 per cent – can be analysed as having multiple head acts. In general, we treated these head acts separately. However, multiple head acts that were strongly linked (i.e. they approximated to one semantic unit) were considered one head act. These include coordinated verb phrases / clauses of the type *Go and tell ...* or *Will you take your turn and be instructed?*, as well as instances that are part of a parallel series, such as: *Say you ly'd, say I'm busie, shut the door; Say any thing.*
- Formulae based on requests (e.g. *Come, come, Look you*) are not included if they are clearly support moves for a head act (usually “alerters”), as in this example: *Look you, Madam, we are alone, -- pray contain your self, and hear me.*
- For the same rationale as above, requestive segments supporting questions are excluded, for example: *Leave your raillery, and tell us, is there any New Wit come forth, Songs or Novels?*
- Indirect speech acts in which the requestive force is the direct force and not the indirect force are excluded. This mostly applied to wishes and curses (often supernatural) such as *Lightning blast him!* and also apologies of the type *I beg your pardon Ladies.*
- Third-person requests are usually excluded from speech act analyses. However, where the target of the request was the addressee, we included the request as a special kind of request, which we labelled “relay requests”. These are typically delivered by a servant, for example: *Of a Citizen Madam that intreats to speake with your Ladship.*
- Grammatically elliptical requests, such as *In baggage, in* (*baggage* is an impolite vocative), are usually treated as imperative and very direct, or “mood derivable” requests (e.g. Blum-Kulka et al. 1989a: CCSARP coding manual, p. 279; Aijmer 1996: 183). However, in our data it was not always clearly the case that the ellipted material might have correlated with a direct imperative. We also encountered

requests that were fragmented over several turns. Consequently, we assigned such cases to their own category of “elliptical requests”.

- Permission requests can be treated as a specific kind of indirect request, and constructions involving *let me* are considered functionally similar (Aijmer 1996 :161–163). However, the historical situation regarding *let* constructions has a number of complexities (e.g. should they be taken as periphrastic imperatives? are they “hortatives”? to what extent does *let* have its full verb sense of ‘allow/cause’?) (see Kohnen 2004, for a detailed discussion of the issues, and also section 6.2). Also, we noted early in our study that constructions involving *let us* were particularly frequent in our data. Consequently, we assigned constructions involving *let* to their own category.
- We categorised negative imperatives separately (by negative imperatives we mean cases where the scope of the negative element – usually *not* or *never* – refers to an imperative verb, e.g. *do not, be not, go not*; this excludes examples like *you must not go*). This was so that we could examine whether they behave in the same way as positive imperatives.

We believe that some of the above exclusions indicate that our analytical framework is not yet optimal, and that the exclusions are a result of the fact that the CCSARP framework is tailored for the analysis of discourse completion task data, whilst we are investigating naturally occurring extended data.¹⁰ We will return to these points later in the paper.

5. Our data and its sociopragmatic annotation

Kohnen (2002a: 241–242) points out a further problem with the study of directives, namely, the lack of sufficient data: the number of examples in classic corpora tend to be fairly low. For example, he reports that only 36 examples of interrogative directives occur in the *Helsinki Corpus*. He also notes that 85 per cent of these belong to two text-types (play texts and trial proceedings) amounting to 79,000 words in total. Our data – the *Sociopragmatic Corpus* (SPC) – also consists of play texts and trial proceedings. The *Sociopragmatic Corpus* is drawn from the 1.3 million-word *Corpus of English Dialogues 1560–1760*, covers the period 1640–1760, and totals 219,780 words (103,980 words of which relate to trial proceedings and 115,800 words of which relate to play texts)¹¹:

The unique feature of our historical corpus is that socio-pragmatic information is not included in file headers (as, for example, in the *British National Corpus*), but attached to

10. Even drama is naturally occurring in the sense that it is in no way shaped by language researchers.

11. We opted to annotate drama and trial proceedings as they offer interactive, face-to-face, speech-related data, which has only a minimum of narratorial intervention: drama consists of imaginary constructed dialogue, and trial proceedings are the supposed record of a prior speech event (see Archer and Culpeper 2003).

individual utterances, in order to capture the rapid social and pragmatic shifts that occur during an interaction. By way of brief illustration, take the following tagged utterance:

```
<u speaker="s" spid="s4tfranc001" spsex="m" sprole1="v" spstatus="1" spage="9"
  addressee="s" adid="s4tfranc003" spsex="m" adrole="w" adstatus="4" adage=
  "8">Look upon this Book; Is this the Book?</u>
```

Reading through the fields in the <u> element appended to the utterance, we learn that this utterance was spoken by a single speaker identified by the code s4tfranc001, and that the speaker is male, acting as a prosecutor, of “gentry” social status and an “older adult”. We also learn that this person is speaking to a single addressee identified by the code s4tfranc003, and that the addressee is male, a witness, of “commoner” social status and an “adult” (more information about all of these values and indeed the design of the annotation scheme can be found in Archer and Culpeper 2003). In most cases, the <u> element constituted the whole of one speaker’s conversational turn. What would trigger the start of a new <u> element is if (1) some non-speech appeared, or (2) a value in the <u> element needed to be changed. The <u> element only encloses direct speech. Thus, for example, the appearance of a stage direction in a play text would bring about the end of the <u> element before the stage direction and require the opening of a new <u> element when direct speech begins again after the stage direction. <u> element values would change if there was either a change of speaker or a change of addressee. The latter kind of change is particularly significant: recording who is speaking in a text is relatively easy and can be done through the header; it is recording who is being spoken to that requires a dynamic approach. Consider the following example taken from the Trial of King Charles I:

```
[$ (^Lord President.^) $] <u speaker="s" spid="s3tcharl001" spsex="m"
  sprole1="j" spstatus="1" spage="9" addressee="s" adid="s3tcharl002" adsex="m"
  adrole1="d" adstatus="0"
  adage="9">If this be all that you will say,</u>
<u speaker="s" spid="s3tcharl001" spsex="m" sprole1="j" spstatus="1" spage="9"
  addressee="m" adid="x" adsex="m" adrole1="n" adstatus="x"
  adage="x">then, Gentlemen, you that brought the
  Prisoner hither, take charge of him back
  again.</u>
```

Here, the speaker begins with one addressee but switches to another in the same turn. As the new addressee requires new values, a new <u> begins.

6. Requests and directness: Patterns of distribution in the *Sociopragmatic Corpus* (trials and plays, 1640–1760)

6.1 Overall distribution

Table 1 displays the overall frequencies of utterances (i.e. the <u> elements as defined in section 5), requests and multiple requests (as defined in section 4). Percentages are given in brackets (in the “requests” column, they are the percentages of utterances which are requests; in the “multiple requests” column, they are the percentages of requests which occur together in one <u> element).

Table 1. Frequencies of requests in the SPC

Text-type	Utterances	Requests	Multiple requests
Trials	4250	466 (11.0)	231 (49.6)
Drama	5186	837 (16.5)	98 (11.7)
Trials and Drama	9436	1303 (13.8)	329 (25.2)

From this table, one can see that requests do not occur with great frequency in either play texts (just 16.5 per cent of utterances) or trial proceedings (just 11 per cent of utterances). That said, requests occur more frequently in the former than in the latter. This, one might suppose, is a consequence of the goals being pursued within the activities (re)presented in the two text types. The business of the courtroom is largely to establish guilt (or innocence) through a gathering of the facts, and thus speech acts relating to the exchange of information dominate (e.g. querying, inquiring); whilst, in the fictional worlds created by plays, there is a broader range of activities, including activities in which characters attempt to shape the world (e.g. a request that somebody comes or goes).

Notice that 49.6 per cent of the requests that occur in trial proceedings occur in clusters (i.e. in one utterance). Interestingly, defendants (i.e. the least powerful participants in a courtroom context) were responsible for a third of these multiple requests (that is 78 out of a possible 231 or 33.8 per cent) in addition to 48 single requests. However, most of these (singular and multiple) requests were utilized by six defendants facing treason trials in the period 1640 to 1679, whose status was that of “professional” or higher (see Archer and Culpeper 2003 for detailed definitions of each of the status categories). We would argue, then, that defendants may have utilized a multiple requesting strategy in an attempt to bolster the effectiveness of their requests. This strategy was nearly always unsuccessful, and suggested an element of (understandable)

desperation on their part (see Archer 2006 for further detail: see also section 7).¹² The defendant with the highest status was Charles I (see Archer 2006 for further detail respecting the other defendants). His power beyond the courtroom clashed with his power in the courtroom. He was continually rebuked for requiring that he be *shew[n ...] where ever the House of Commons was a Court of Judicature of that kind* and for not *hear[ing] the Court*. Not deterred by such warnings, he continued to request that he be allowed *to speak* even after Bradshaw had sentenced him and instructed that he be *withdraw[n]*:

King I may speak after the *sentence*
 By your favor Sir, I may speak after the *sentence* ever.
 By your favor (hold) the *sentence* Sir --
 I say Sir I do --
 I am not suffered for to speak, except what Justice other people will have.

6.2 The distribution of broad categories of directness

Table 2 provides a breakdown of all directives in the *Sociopragmatic Corpus* (whether in a singular or multiple distribution):

Table 2. Frequencies of types of request in the SPC

Text-type	Impositive (inc. negated)	Conv. Indirect+ Let	Other Conv. Indirect	Hint	Problem	Elliptical	Total
Trials	398 (78.8)	27 (5.3)	24 (4.8)	6 (1.2)	40 (7.9)	10 (2)	505 (100)
Drama	733 (76.3)	100 (10.4)	34 (3.5)	15 (1.6)	37 (3.9)	41 (4.3)	960 (100)

We can identify items that fit into all three broad directness categories (impositives, conventional indirectness and hints), and thus Blum-Kulka's (e.g. 1989) claims of universality seem to be supported in a diachronic perspective. However, precisely where the borders between those categories should be, and, indeed, whether those categories should be split thereby increasing the number of categories, is not certain.

A particularly problematic area relates to want-statements (e.g. *I desire, I wish*), and, to a lesser extent, obligation-statements. From a theoretical point of view, these are

12. The desperation was understandable, as the defendants' lives rested on the outcome of the trials. Indeed, only one of the six to utilize a requesting strategy in the period 1640-1679 was acquitted.

different from mood derivables or performatives; indeed, they fit Searle's classic definition of an indirect request as an assertion performing a request. Aijmer (1996: 154–156) discusses “want and need statements” under indirect requests, but notes that they express a “speaker's wishes directly” and are as “direct and assertive as a request” (Aijmer presumably used the terms “directly/direct” to mean explicitly/explicit here). One reason why such requests might be perceived as direct (explicit) is if they orientate towards what might be a central feature of prototypical requests: the felicity condition of volition, i.e. the fact that the source of the speech act wants the target to do the future act (cf. Searle 1969: 66; Bach and Harnish 1979: 48). Turning to the historical situation, Kohnen (2002) also treats such requests as indirect. However, importantly, he notes that Middle English examples involving *will* could be taken as performatives of some kind, and thus cannot, he argues, be indirect. In fact, Bach and Harnish (1992; see also Bach 1995) would see even performatives as indirect in Searle's original sense. Indeed, they view them as self-reflexive assertions (e.g. *I command / request / demand / etc.*) performing another illocutionary act (e.g. a request) by means of a conventionalised device (e.g. a performative verb). Kohnen comments that other examples belonging to the want-statement category, mostly involving *would*, *desire* and *wish*, are not “straight commands but are more or less polite requests” (Kohnen 2002b: 169). This does not quite tally with the present-day “direct and assertive” sense given by Aijmer (1996). Clearly, the lesson for us here is that individual linguistic strategies need to be examined in order to unpick the complexity of the category. We will do this in sections 7 and 8. For now, note that, although we seem to have generally supported Blum-Kulka's claims, we lacked solid criteria on which to draw distinctions between the broad categories.

A further categorization problem concerns let-requests: are they conventionally indirect? Oddly, let-requests seem not to be mentioned in Blum-Kulka et al (1989a), but they are clearly of some importance in the historical context, as our figures show. Aijmer (1996: 163), giving the example “let me see your beautiful camera”, suggests that *let me* is: (i) a strategy used in permission requests, (ii) can be compared with *can you*, and (iii) has the illocutionary force of a suggestion. So, *let me* might be categorised as a “suggestory” formula, i.e. a conventional indirect strategy. However, Kohnen (2004) points out that the historical situation is more complex: *let* could also – and frequently did – have the status of a main verb and the sense of ‘allow’ or ‘cause’. Thus, a historical interpretation of Aijmer's sentence could be that “[i]nstead of requesting the addressee to do something, the speaker asks the addressee ‘to allow him/her’ or ‘to cause him/her’ to experience the results of the requested action” (Kohnen 2004: 164). This is still indirect, as it addresses a preparatory condition concerning a constraint on performing the action. Moreover, even in this interpretation, Kohnen (2004: 172) notes that *let* is similar to other indirect requests like *can you / would you / could I* in that it “invokes a strategy of approval (involving the ability or volition of the addressee)”. This interpretation would lead to the classification of let-requests as query preparatory. In either case, then, they are conventional indirect requests.

As figure 1 below (taken from Blum-Kulka and House 1989: 134) reveals, conventional indirectness is the most frequent strategy in all the languages considered in the CCSARP. Strikingly, figure 2 shows that our historical study of requests does not match this particular finding.

Figure 1: CCSARP (in %)

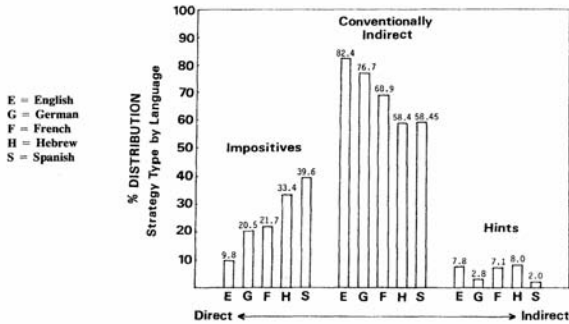
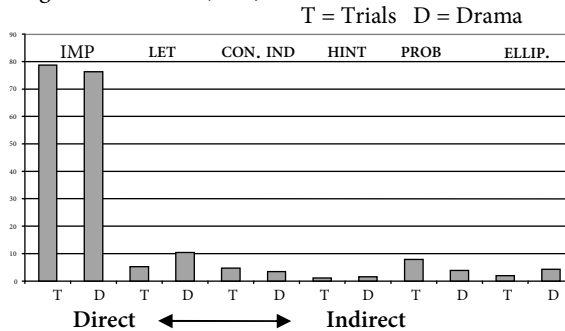


Figure 2: SPC data (in %)



Figures 1 and 2. The distribution of conventional indirectness in the CCSARP project (Figure 1, from Blum-Kulka and House 1989: 134) and the SPC data (Figure 2)

Indeed, conventional indirect requests are used much less frequently than impositives, even if conventional indirect let-requests are combined with other types of conventional indirect request, in both the trial and drama texts. The frequency of conventional indirect requests does rise somewhat to 163 (that is, 16.98 per cent) in the drama texts and 81 (that is, 16.04 per cent) in the trial texts, if we conclude that *desire* and *wish* forms of want-statements can be added to let-requests and other conventional indirect requests. Nevertheless, the impositive remains the most frequent request in the drama and trial texts by far, accounting for 704 (that is, 73.33 per cent) and 368 (that is, 72.87 per cent) of occurrences respectively.

In the two following analysis sections, we will probe and reflect further on our major findings here.

7. Specific strategies for conventional indirect requests and their distribution

Given that the number of conventional indirect requests in our data is low, we will not merely present a table, but will look closely at the contexts of particular instances. We found 27 conventional indirect let-requests and 24 other conventional indirect requests in the trial proceedings. Three illustrative examples of the let-requests are as follows (the emboldening has been added to the items under discussion):

- Pray **let us** hear what you say to that. (*Trial of Ambrose Rockwood*, 1691)
- My Lord, Pray **let him** know what is done, to warn him, lest he fall into the same condemnation. (*Trial of John Mordant*, 1658)
- Is this the bringing an end to the *Treaty* in the publike Faith of the world? **Let me** see a legal *Authority* warranted by the Word of God, the Scriptures, or warranted by the *Constitutions* of the Kingdom, and I will answer. (*Trial of King Charles I*, 1650)

Let-requests always involve the structure *let* [FIRST/THIRD PERSON PRONOUN] [VERB]. The above are typical in that they were spoken, by and large, by people of high status who enjoyed a powerful role within the courtroom. Thus, the first example was uttered by a judge to a lawyer for the defence. Judges within the SPC trial data utilized a further five let-requests, which were either addressed to lawyers for the defence (x2) or to courtroom aides (x3). Similarly, the second example was uttered by the Attorney General to the Lord President. Prosecution lawyers were responsible for a further seven let-requests in the SPC trial data, nearly half of which (x3) were addressed to witnesses. The third example is slightly different, in that it was uttered by a defendant to the Lord President, but that defendant was Charles I, who acted as though still in the role of “king” and “ruler” in the courtroom setting. Indeed, he utilized five of the seven let-requests uttered by the SPC defendants, as well as a number of additional conventional indirect requests and impositives (see Archer 2006).

Regarding the other conventional indirect requests utilized in the SPC trial data, there were two main patterns: ten examples fell into the pattern *will you* VERB, whilst eight fell into [*If*] [SECOND/THIRD PERSON PRONOUN] [*will*] *please* [*to*] [VERB/*that*]. Three examples of each of these strategies follow:

- Then, Gentlemen, **will you sum up**. (*Trial of Rockwood*, 1696)
- **Will you tell** my Lord and the Jury, upon what Account, and by whose Means, you first became acquainted? (*Trial of Christopher Layer*, Esq., 1722)
- Mr. *Gadbury*, You are a man of Learning, pray **will you give** your *Testimony* of the things that you know in relation to Mrs. *Cellier*. (*Trial of Elizabeth Cellier*, 1680)

- *My Lord, the Judicature is not yet clear'd to me, for the legality of it, and if you please to give a little patience I shall give you the reasons why.* (*Trial of Hewet*, 1658)
- I have some others to proceed against, **if you will please that** Mr. Doctor may dispatch one way or other. I must pray your final sentence. (*Trial of Hewet*, 1658)
- You shall have Justice done if you will plead, if not there was a President but now; **if you please to put** your self upon the Trial, you shall have a fair Trial. (*Trial of Hewet*, 1658)

The three examples of the *will you* VERB-strategy are typical in that they were spoken by participants with a powerful role in the courtroom, most notably, the prosecution lawyers. Indeed, the prosecution lawyers in our corpus data utilised the strategy on six occasions, whilst the judges and lawyers for the defence did so on two occasions each. The first example above was spoken by a judge to a prosecution team in general; the second by a prosecution lawyer to a witness; and the third by a Lord Chief Justice to a witness. A second typical feature of the ten *will you* VERB-requests is that the addressees were witnesses (of varying status) (indeed, the one exception to this pattern is the first example). Most of the *will you* VERB-requests utilised by lawyers (prosecution and defence) typically requested that witnesses *give [X] an account* (x6) or *tell [X]* (x2) what they know. This particular pattern may well indicate that *will you* VERB-requests served a similar function to that of *inquire (into)*-questions in the historical courtroom, that is to say, they sought to solicit a verbal response from A (= addressee) which would cause those present within the courtroom to know some things about Y (where Y = an action / event / behaviour / person; see Archer 2005). The potential “fuzziness” of speech act boundaries is well documented for the modern courtroom. For example, Walker (1987: 59–60) has suggested that “it is as commands to deliver information [...] that most serious utterances by a lawyer to a witness, whether structurally questions or not, must be understood”.¹³ We believe that we can nevertheless tease out differences between directive and rogative speech acts, whilst still allowing for an element of fuzziness. For example, the SPC data suggests that *will you* VERB-requests tended to occur in isolation and serve as a discursal opener to an interaction (that continued over several turns) and/or tended to initiate a topic, albeit in a general way (e.g. *Will you give an account to X of what you know*). In simple terms, they operated as commands to *begin* delivering information, to use Walker’s (1987: 60) terminology – which helps to justify our inclusion of them in this paper on requests. In contrast, *inquire (into)*-questions tended to occur in clusters (as part of the same questioning sequence). As such, they could occur in both initial and medial position (i.e. as follow-up questions), and often sought quite specific information (e.g. *Did you break it open?*). In

13. Leech (personal correspondence) suggests the opposite to Walker (1987): that, in a courtroom context, all utterances tend to be heard as questions, when uttered by those with a pre-determined questioner role. Schrott (2000: 268), in turn, suggests a third alternative that embraces (rather than eradicates or problematises) fuzziness: “a continuum”, with “interrogation” at one pole and “assertion” at the other.

addition, preliminary investigations suggest that, although *inquire (into)*-questions were used most frequently by lawyers (first the prosecution and then the defence), they were also used quite extensively by the judges and, more significantly, the defendants, suggesting that the *command to deliver information* component may not have been as strong in *inquire (into)*-questions when compared to *will you* VERB-requests.¹⁴

As the first [If] [you/he] [will] please [to] [VERB/that]-request above reveals, defendants did employ this particular request strategy, but only occasionally, for the same defendant, Dr. Hewet, was responsible for the two instances uttered by defendants in the SPC trial data (Hewet addressed both such requests to the judge). The second example above also comes from the same trial, but on this occasion was spoken by the prosecution lawyer to the judge. The third example was spoken by the same prosecution lawyer, but to Mordant, a defendant. It is worth noting that this lawyer is responsible for five of the six [If] [you/he] [will] please [to] [VERB/that]-requests spoken by prosecution lawyers in the SPC trial texts, which may indicate that this particular strategy is a personal idiosyncrasy. Interestingly, there were no instances of judges or lawyers for the defence using this particular requestive strategy.

In the play texts, we found 100 conventional indirect let-requests and 34 other conventional indirect requests. Three illustrative examples of the let-requests, all from George Etherege's *Man of Mode* (1676), are as follows:

- Dear Madam! **Let me** set that Curl in order. (*Man of Mode*, 1676)
- Thou art a man of Wit, and understands The Town: prithee **let thee and I** be intimate, There is no living without making some good Man the confident of our pleasures. (*Man of Mode*, 1676)
- Mr. (^Bellair^)! **let us** walk, 'tis time to leave him, Men grow dull when they begin to be particular. (*Man of Mode*, 1676)

The first example relates to a mistress and servant dyad, with the female servant addressing her mistress. There is only one other such example of a servant addressing her mistress in the SPC drama data. Note here that mistresses often had a special, private and intimate relationship with a female servant, in which the normal power asymmetries were suspended. In other words, such usages are not evidence that this requestive strategy reflects a position of powerlessness. Indeed, although the figures are still low, there are three examples each of masters addressing let-requests to their male servants, and mistresses addressing let-requests to their female servants. The second and third examples above relate to two sets of friends of gentry status (the first male-male, and the second female-male). It is this social context – discourse between friends of high status – that is a distinctive feature of let-requests, accompanying almost one third (that is, 28) of the 100 let-requests. Other dyads to utilize let-requests in the SPC drama data to any noticeable degree include husbands and wives: interestingly,

14. See Archer (2005), for a discussion as to whether we can assume that questions carried a “command” component in the historical courtroom.

however, wives addressed twice as many let-requests to their husbands, although, once again, the figures are low (i.e. ten as opposed to five).

Turning to the other conventional indirect requests in play texts, the most frequent strategy, with 20 instances, is the same as for trial proceedings: the *will you* VERB-pattern. The next most frequent strategy, however, is different. It is *you may* VERB, with five instances. Three examples of each of these strategies follow:

- **Will you** take your turn and be instructed? (*The Man of Mode*, 1676)
- No Matter. But mayhap I may fit 'em as well. **Will you** carry me up and introduce me to Mr. *Worthy's* Sister? (*Chit-Chat*, 1719)
- [\$Ldy (^T.^) \$] Nay, but **will you** be calm -- indeed it's nothing but. (*The Double-dealer, A comedy*. 1694)
- His Servant waits below. **You may** tell him I shall be at home. (*The Suspicious Husband*, 1747)
- Now is your Time. He is in high Conference with his Privy-Counsellor Mr. *Tester*. **You may** come down the Back Stairs, and I'll let you out. (*The Suspicious Husband*, 1747)
- I know not what I have seen, nor what I have heard; but since I'm at Leisure, **you may** tell me, When you fell in Love with me; How you fell in Love with me; and what you have suffer'd, or are ready to suffer for me. (*The Conscious Lovers*, 1723)

The first *will you* VERB-example relates to a friend-friend dyad (of gentry status). However, there are only two further examples of a friend addressing a friend using this particular strategy in the SPC drama data. The second example is also the only example of two acquaintances of gentry status utilizing this requestive strategy, whilst the third is the only example to involve an aunt and a nephew, again of gentry status. The dyad that utilizes this strategy the most in the SPC drama is that of husband-wife, accounting for five out of the total of 14 instances, and illustrated by our third example. With respect to the *you may* VERB-pattern, the role of the addressee is unknown in the first example; the role of the speaker is that of guardian. The second example, again taken from the same play, is one of two examples of a servant addressing her mistress utilizing this requestive strategy. The characters involved in the third example are lovers who are also commoners.

Our discussion of particular conventional indirect strategies and their social contexts has been constrained by low frequencies. However, some trends emerge: in the trial data, conventional indirect requests tend to be used by judges and prosecution lawyers, and also people of high status; in the drama data, there is a striking pattern between status and conventional indirect requests – most (i.e. 30) of the 34 conventional

indirect requests were utilised by speakers of gentry status or above.¹⁵ We have not space for a full analysis of the factors that might influence the specific strategies. For example, we have not considered in any systematic way what is actually being requested and how that might influence strategy choice. Nevertheless, we have some evidence in both trials and drama that *will you* VERB-requests are associated with speakers of relatively high power/status. We noted briefly in section 6.2 with reference to Kohnen (2002) that requests involving *will* could be taken as performatives of some kind in Middle English. Thus, what we find in our data with *will you* VERB-requests could be a legacy of the role of *will* in more direct requests. This would be consistent with their usage by people of relatively high power/status (cf. Brown and Levinson 1987). The pattern [If] [you/he] [will] please [to] [VERB/that] is a more complex structure, whereby the requestive verb is mediated by a conditional clause orientated to volition (i.e. the target's pleasing). Of course, as our square brackets indicate, in many cases we have a reduced conditional clause, even just *please*. But given that this strategy had relatively recently been acquired from French in the Middle English period (cf. "s'il vous plaît"), it is likely that the conditional meaning was still relatively strong. This seems to have been enough to produce a relatively tentative request, suitable for addressing the relatively powerful. Finally, the fact that the strategy *you may* VERB is generally used by people of high status to equals or those below is perhaps not surprising, given that *you may* VERB achieves its requestive force by granting permission to the target to do something, and granting permission is the business of people of status and power.

8. Impositive strategies and their context

As we revealed in section 6, impositive strategies dominate Early Modern English. But how robust is the overall category "impositive strategies", and does that label disguise much variation within? Is it in fact the support moves accompanying the head act that carry the main social load in Early Modern English and counter-balance the directness of the head act? Our analyses in this section focus on positive impositives (e.g. all examples of negative imperatives were coded separately and kept apart), and instances which contain just one head act (or multiple heads that could be considered one semantic unit).

Table 3 displays the distribution of impositive strategies in drama and trials.

15. Remaining strategies, whether in trial proceedings or play texts, occurred no more than three times. These include two examples of *I hope (you will please)*-requests in the trial data, both of which were addressed to judges by defendants and also three examples of *shall I/we ...*-requests in the drama data, one of which was negated: *I swear Mrs. Wildman, you talk pleasantly, come Marina, shall we not be going?*

Table 3. Impositive strategies

	Drama	Trials	Trials / drama combined
Mood derivable, imperative (e.g. <i>Take away her sword!</i>)	351	120	471
Explicit performative (e.g. <i>I demand to know, I charge you tell me</i>)	2	9	11
Hedged performative (e.g. <i>I beg</i>)	4	5	9
Locution derivable or obligation-statement, obligation on H (e.g. <i>you'll entertain Bellamar, you must not be angry</i>)	44	9	53
Locution derivable or obligation-statement, obligation on S or S and H (e.g. <i>we must go to the city, I must speak to you</i>)	7	4	11
Want-statement, speaker's desire (e.g. <i>I would speak with you</i>)	4	50	54
Prediction/intention (speaker's prediction of or intention to perform individual or joint action, e.g. <i>thee and I will make a visit</i>)	2	1	3
Multiple heads with different directness categories	4	-	4
Unclear	5	1	6

Before commenting on matters of distribution, we will briefly draw attention to some of the impositive strategies. The categories mood derivable, explicit performative, hedged performative, locution derivable or obligation-statement, and want-statement are all taken from the CCSARP scheme, as outlined in Blum-Kulka et al. (1989a) (see section 3.2). In addition, we have added two categories for items which are not accommodated within that scheme. The examples of Locution derivable or obligation statements given in Blum-Kulka et al. always involved placing the obligation on the target. However, we have examples where the obligation is placed on the speaker or the speaker and the hearer. One possibility is to consider all of these as obligation statements, but recognize that they vary in terms of viewpoint (see 2.2.2). But this does not reflect the way that Blum-Kulka et al. treat the category. Indeed, perhaps the reason why Blum-Kulka et al. treat it as the fourth most direct strategy is precisely because it explicitly obliges the target to do something. In contrast, orientating towards the speaker is clearly a less direct (i.e. more implicit) way of conveying the illocutionary point which involves action on the part of the target. Thus, we have created a second obligation statement category, but this time involving the speaker.¹⁶ The other category we have added is that of prediction/intention. This category captures cases where the speaker orientates towards the futurity of the propositional content of the request (see

16. At best this is a borderline impositive. There may be a case for saying it should be classified as conventional indirectness.

section 2.1).¹⁷ Finally, with regard to the category hedged performative, Blum-Kulka et al.'s (e.g. 1989a: 279) scheme involves cases where the performative verb is within a subordinate clause, such as "I must/have to ask you to clean the kitchen right now". This syntactic structure is also reflected in all the cases discussed in the seminal paper on hedged performatives: Fraser (1975). However, Fraser is explicitly clear that a performative sentence is not simply a syntactic sentence type but a "set of syntactic and semantic properties" (1975: 188). This being so, we decided to count as hedged performatives cases where the requestive force was semantically modified through the choice of performative verb. Verbs such as *beg*, *plead*, *crave* and *beseech* do not conventionally express the same power dynamics as verbs such as *demand*, *order*, *command* or *ask*. Rather, they "share the inherent property that the speaker is 'requesting' from a position of powerlessness, relative to the hearer" (Fraser 1975: 197).

The fact that we have added extra categories to our classification of impositives is not necessarily a reflection of the fact that we are looking at historical data. Indeed, one possible reason for such differences may relate to the type of data: as we have already noted, we are looking at naturally occurring data, whereas Blum-Kulka et al. (1989a) collected their data via discourse completion tasks. Furthermore, our addition of categories also reflects Aijmer's (1996: 131) observation that there is "little agreement about how many strategies there are and which they are". Nevertheless, whatever the exact number of strategy categories, some notable characteristics of Early Modern English impositives emerge from our analysis. Three quarters of our impositives (471 instances; 75.7 per cent) simply employ the imperative, they are mood derivables. This contrasts dramatically with present-day studies: for example, the percentage given by Blum-Kulka and House (1989) for all impositive strategies combined in Australian English is only 9.8 per cent. Two other categories of note (according to our data), though well behind mood derivables, are want-statement, speaker's desire, which account for 8.7 per cent of requests, and locution derivable or obligation-statements, obligation on H, which account for 8.5 per cent of requests. Clear genre differences are apparent in both of these categories. The fact that want-statements, speaker's desire are relatively frequent in trials may be a consequence of the fact that the institutional context did not necessarily accommodate the "wants" of all the participants, notably, those with less power, such as the defendant. In particular, this strategy is often used to negotiate speaking rights, which were not automatically ascribed to the defendant. We have already noted in section 6.2 that the status of want-statements as direct strategies is problematic. The relative frequency within drama of items in the category locution

17. This category overlaps somewhat with a type of hedged performative discussed in Fraser (1975: 205-207) and could be taken as a conventional indirect strategy; indeed, Blum-Kulka (1989) appears to do so. However, her examples all involve questions, which is not the case in our data. We also have no basis, such as frequency, to indicate a "conventional" strategy. Whatever the case, the actual instances of this category are paltry, and thus in no way affect the general conclusions we draw.

derivable or obligation-statements, obligation on H may be a consequence of the fact that, unlike the courtroom, the rights and obligations of individuals are not underpinned by an institutional context, but have to be asserted and negotiated. Moreover, asserting and negotiating rights and obligations would seem to be a good way of producing dynamic dramatic dialogue, and of providing information to the audience about the social constraints that compel, vex or appease characters.

The fact that requests in Early Modern English are so strikingly characterised by the most direct and explicit impositive strategy raises some questions about whether the wheels of social interaction were oiled in other ways in this period. One possibility is that head acts were receiving internal modification of some kind (i.e. optional elements which mitigate the impositive force of the request were included). Present-day examples of mitigating elements include the use of the interrogative, the negation of a preparatory condition, the subjunctive, the conditional, the conditional clause, politeness markers, hedges, downtoners, appealers, and so on. We will not describe these in detail, partly because they are so infrequent in our data, if they occur at all. We also had some concerns about how we might distinguish between internal and external modification (see section 2.2.2). Appealers, for example, are listed under internal modification by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989a: 275), examples of which all involve tag questions, including: “clean up the kitchen, dear, *will you?/okay?*”. But, in our view, if the tag were removed, the request would still be realised; thus they are not an “essential” part of the request (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989: 275). There are also some tricky historical issues to do with items such as, “prithēe”, which have evolved from the parentheticals. In fact, the whole issue of what counts as a head act is problematic. For the purposes of our analyses, we took a narrow view of the head act, which amounted to the subject and predicator associated with the request. This left very few examples, such as *I humbly beg leave to be excused*, which could be considered to have internal modification. However, even if we follow the definitions of Blum-Kulka et al. (1989a), we still end up with very few instances, as we hinted above (see categories such as appealers, hedges, and conditionals in Table 5).

Regarding external modification, Blum-Kulka et al.’s (1989a) two sub-categories, alerters and support moves, are distinguished on the basis of whether they occur before or after the head act. Alerters, Blum-Kulka et al. (1989a: 277) claim, function to “alert the Hearer’s attention to the ensuing speech act”. In these terms, alerters can hardly be described as modifying the requestive force, but merely ensure that the channel is open. Contrary to this, the actual examples that Blum-Kulka et al. (1989a: 277) list do signal a range of social meanings. They include various terms of address (e.g. titles, surname, first name, nickname), for example. However, true alerters (e.g. “hey”, “oy”) are not listed. For these reasons, we will label our alerters “pre-support moves”.

Table 4 displays the presence or otherwise of support moves for our impositive requests.

Table 4. The frequencies of support moves in impositive requests

	Trials	Drama	Trials / drama combined
Zero support moves	103	187	290
Pre-support move only	63	105	168
Post-support move only	11	87	98
Both pre and post-support move	22	45	67

A striking feature of this table is that 46.5 per cent of impositive requests have no support move at all. Regarding the present day, Faerch and Kasper (1989: 240) hypothesized that the relatively high usage of support moves amongst Danish speakers with conventional indirect requests is a result of “person-oriented rather than status-oriented” interaction. Whether or not this hypothesis holds, their analyses show that it is “characteristic for adult communicative behaviour to explicitly establish rather than presuppose common ground, and this tendency is mirrored in the external request support” (1989: 240). Such a hypothesis could also account for our results. The relatively well-defined and widely known status hierarchies of Early Modern England could account for why support moves are not frequent, even in the context of direct and explicit requests. Participants could have assumed certain rights to make a request and thus did not undertake politeness work to redress infringements of social norms. Table 4 also shows that pre-support moves are approaching double the number of post-support moves, though the difference is more marked in trials than in drama. In order to be able to explain these results, we need to consider the particular types of pre- and post-support move.

Table 5 (below) presents the frequencies of different types of support move. Only three support move types stand out with respect to frequency: items with *pray*, vocatives and grounders. Vocatives are the most frequent category. A vocative both alerts a target that the request is directed to them and offers the possibility of marking a particular social relationship. In so doing, it prepares the ground for the impending request. The socially rich system of vocatives in the SPC drama data has been documented in detail in Shiina (2005), where a close connection with requests was also observed. Vocatives, disguised under the heading alerters, are barely discussed in the work of Blum-Kulka and her colleagues. A partial explanation for this could be that they have ceased to be of such significance in doing politeness work. The next most frequent category, according to our data, relates to *pray*. Blum-Kulka et al. (1989a) count the conventional politeness marker *please* as an internal head act modifier. With regard to items with *pray*, a case for considering more contracted forms such as *prithiee* as internal modifiers might be made. However, this category includes much variation, up to the full *I pray you*, which might be counted as an external support move. That this linguistic feature had not yet undergone full grammaticalization

Table 5. The frequencies of types of support move in drama and trials

	Drama		Trials		Trials/ drama combined	
	Pre- support moves	Post- support moves	Pre- support moves	Post- support moves	Pre- support moves	Post- support moves
Items with <i>pray</i> (e.g. <i>pray, prithee</i>)	34	–	15	–	49	–
Vocatives (neutral or positive, e.g. <i>madam, good doctor</i>)	47	32	25	1	72	33
Appealers (e.g. <i>for my sake</i>)	3	2	–	–	3	2
Hedges (e.g. <i>well</i>)	6	–	–	–	6	–
Grounders (e.g. <i>make haste. He'll overtake us before we get in</i>)	21	60	6	6	27	66
Conditionals (e.g. <i>if you are resolv'd upon your Scheme, open to me without reserve</i>)	4	4	3	1	7	5
Minimizers (e.g. <i>suspend your Fury for a Minute</i>)	–	1	–	1	–	2
Promises of reward (e.g. <i>Stay, oh stay, and I will tell you all</i>)	–	1	–	–	–	1
Disarmers (e.g. <i>We cannot be too private. Come hither</i>)	1	–	1	–	2	–
Multiple	26	21	7	–	33	21
Unclear, none of the above or split between categories	9	13	6	2	15	15

is reflected in the fact that it only occurs as a pre-support move; present-day *please* in contrast occurs in a variety of positions (see examples in Aijmer 1996: 166–168). Finally, note how *I pray you* works in its full, semantically unbleached form: it is an act of supplication, marking the relative power of the interlocutor. Our third most frequent support move category is grounders. This is the most frequent category in present-day data (see Faerch and Kasper 1989: 237–238 and references therein). Unlike the previous two categories we have discussed, grounders appear more frequently in post-position. One explanation for this is that their function (to give reasons/explanations as to why a request is taking place) tends to ensure that they are longer elements than other support moves. Further, according to the Principle of End-weight, one would expect to see longer elements towards the end of the utterance. Note, however, that grounders are scarce in trials when compared with drama. In fact, only six occur in post-position in the trial texts compared with 60 in the drama data. It is this that accounts for some striking aspects of the distribution of support moves in table 4: the fact that there are few post-support moves – a mere eleven – in trials compared with 87 in drama is due to the lack of grounders in trials. We would suggest that there are few grounders in trials for the same reasons that many impositives within the trials have no support at all: in the institutional context of the courtroom, the status of participants and their rights and obligations are partly common knowledge and, as such, there is no need to explicitly establish them.

9. Summary and discussion of major findings

The results in section 6 revealed that late Early Modern English requests are dramatically different from all five of the languages studied by Blum-Kulka and House (1989: 133), with respect to the overwhelming dominance of impositive strategies, which account for approximately 73 per cent of requests in both trials and drama. It should not be inferred from this that Early Modern English culture was in any way less polite than present-day cultures, as indirectness and politeness cannot be taken as necessary correlates (Blum-Kulka 1987). Our results are facts about the pragmalinguistic nature of requests (e.g. that they often have the formal characteristics of impositives); they are not sociopragmatic findings (e.g. that those impositives have polite meanings for participants in that culture). If we cast our net wider than the CCSARP project, there are in fact present-day parallels for our findings for the Early Modern English, notably the case of Polish. According to Wierzbicka ([1991]2003: 33), today in Polish

the use of interrogative forms outside the domain of questions is very limited, and since the interrogative form is not culturally valued as a means of performing directives, there was, so to speak, no cultural need to develop special interrogative devices for performing speech acts other than questions, and in particular, for performing directives.

She goes on to add that the “flat imperative, which in English cultural tradition can be felt to be more offensive than swearing, in Polish constitutes one of the milder, softer options in issuing directives” (2003: 36). Stronger options include the use of impersonal syntactic constructions with the infinitive. Imperatives, in contrast, assume a second-person addressee (some take this to be part of the semantics of imperatives). So, impersonal infinitive constructions build distance. This, in a sense, is just what conventional indirect interrogative directives do in present-day English: they ascribe autonomy to the addressee and give them an opportunity not to comply with the request. The difference, Wierzbicka (2003: 37) suggests, is that “in Anglo-Saxon culture, distance is a positive cultural value, associated with respect for the autonomy of the individual. By contrast, in Polish culture it is associated with hostility and alienation”.

What we have been describing in Polish would be consistent with our results for late Early Modern English. We have certainly found no evidence that our impositives are “felt to be more offensive than swearing” or “associated with hostility and alienation”. It seems more likely that the lack of distance associated with impositives, particularly imperatives, has neutral or even positive value. This would also be consistent with the findings of Kopytko (1995), who suggested, on the basis of politeness analyses of Shakespeare’s plays, that Early Modern English may orientate to a “positive politeness culture”, unlike the “negative politeness culture” of today. In such a culture, distance would not be valued.

Overall, in both drama and trials, conventional indirect requests tend to be used by relatively powerful people (whether in terms of role, status or both) or intimates of high-status. On the face of it, this is not what Brown and Levinson (1987) predict for power relationships or what Blum-Kulka and House (1989) (and indeed many other researchers) have found, namely, that more power relative to others correlates with greater directness. Certainly, there is no clear evidence that generally conventional indirect requests are being promoted by those with less power. A particular feature of all the major conventional indirect strategies we explored in section 7 is that they gravitate towards either (1) volition, specifically, the addressee’s willingness to do something (e.g. *will you* VERB, [*If*] [*you/he*] [*will*] *please [to]* [VERB/*that*]), or (2) granting permission (e.g. *you may* VERB). Let-requests provide examples of both these categories, depending on whether they request that something be “allowed” or suggest that something be “desired” (see section 6.2). If we relate this to the Obstacle Hypothesis, we can hypothesize that in the historical context the most salient obstacles to the successful accomplishment of a request are the addressee’s volition and permission. That this is so fits Early Modern English society, which was comprised of elites who were able to impose their will on many others, and that ability to impose was sustained by institutional structures. Our finding is in marked contrast to the present-day situation in which most conventional indirect requests orientate to the preparatory condition of ability (e.g. *Could/can you ...*) (see, for example, Aijmer 1996: 132–133; and also Blum-Kulka 1989: 50). An explanation for this might be that what counts as a salient obstacle in society has changed. Indeed, this shift in conventional indirectness strategy would

fit, what Fairclough (1993: 98) calls, the “democratization of discourse”, which involves “the reduction of overt markers of power asymmetry between people of unequal institutional power”.

The most striking finding in section 8 is the extent to which Early Modern English requests are performed with the imperative mood. Requests seem to have had a much closer association with the grammatical system. Since that period, they have undergone diversification of form. Interestingly, the next most frequent strategies, want-statements and locution derivable or obligation-statements, overlap with the most frequent strategies we noted for conventional indirectness. There, as here, volition is important. Also, there we noted the importance of permission; here we note the importance of obligation. The two are not unrelated: giving permission removes a constraint for not doing something; stating an obligation imposes a constraint for not doing something. So, again we encounter an Early Modern world of personal desires intermeshed with rights and obligations, both sustained by social power structures. A further striking feature of our findings is that almost half of these impositive requests have no support move. This suggests that in this social context requests simply did not need mitigation or modification. In the relatively hierarchical society of Early Modern England, those who did requests did not need to explicitly establish a basis for expediting their requests. Consistent with this is the fact that, when support moves do occur they are most frequently vocatives and often items with *pray*, both of which can serve to remind the interlocutor of their relative social position or power. Grounders are not the most frequent support move as they are in Present-day English and, when they do occur, they seem to favour discourse amongst equals, as in much of the drama discourse, rather than non-equal discourse, as in much of the trial proceedings.

10. Concluding remarks

One unexpected implication of our study concerns the claim, as voiced by many, for example, Holdcroft (1994), that there are many counter examples to the hypothesis that formal features determine illocutionary force. This is much more true today than it was in late Early Modern English. Well over half the requests were expressed with the imperative mood: formal features played a key role in determining requestive illocutionary force. Nevertheless, we still have to identify and account for requests that are not in some way grammaticalized. This, we argue, is best pursued by assuming that requests have prototype-like structures. Features of requests should not be confined to Searle-type felicity conditions, but, crucially, must include aspects of the social context, as argued by Holdcroft (1994) and empirically demonstrated by Holtgraves in his research on Present-day English (1994). However, merely claiming that speech acts have prototypical structures is not enough. By deploying a corpus-based methodology, we were able to discover which features are likely to be more prototypical of Early Modern requests. Three features emerge as highly prototypical: (1) the imperative (a

formal feature), (2) volition (a contextual belief, relating to the willingness of the target to perform the action or the desire of the speaker of the speech act that the action be performed), and (3) obligation (a contextual belief, relating to the obligations of the producer or target of the request). In contrast, a key feature of today's requests is ability (a contextual belief, relating to the ability of the target to perform a future action). A prototype, however, does not explain why some features become a focus of linguistic expressions while others do not. This is where the Obstacle Hypothesis can be of help. Obstacles are the specific features of social situations which hinder the successful performance of a request. In our discussion, we have argued for volition and obligation being particular obstacles in the Early Modern world, given that the few could exert their will on the many and social constraints sustained their ability to do so. Power structures underpin the performance – particularly the successful performance – of requests. If we take speech act prototypes as being similar to the illocutionary scenarios developed by Thornburg and Panther (1997), Panther and Thornburg (1998), and Pérez Hernández and Ruiz de Mendoza (2002), then we can see obstacles functioning as metonymies for requests.

The findings we have reported here suggest that Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989a) "broad" categories of directness are indeed applicable to late Early Modern English requests, and thus can be seen as "universal" in some sense. However, we have stressed at various points that identifying directness categories, particularly broad categories of directness, is fraught with difficulties. Hence, somewhat like Aijmer (1996), we examined specific pragmalinguistic strategies in detail. In fact, it was at this level of specificity that some of the most striking results of our study were revealed, namely, the high frequency of mood derivables (imperative requests) and the low-frequency of query preparatories (ability interrogatives). Moreover, a fundamental problem is that the CCSARP categories of directness are associated with head acts, and head acts seem to centre on the verb group. However, the assumed primacy of the head act compared with support moves (as implied by the labels "head" and "support"), may not be correct, particularly if we are concerned with explicitness as opposed to directness in Searle's sense. Indeed, Blum-Kulka et al. (1989b: 17) do acknowledge that "some support moves, like Grounders, can serve as requests by themselves". This is important: support moves can become pragmaticalized so that they not only "support" another element signaling the illocutionary force but they themselves actually signal the illocutionary force. *Prithee* is a case in point: it is difficult to imagine that this item, so strongly associated with requestive acts, would not have been taken in many contexts as evidence of the illocutionary force of a request on its own. In other words, it plays a role in making the illocutionary force explicit. This is ignored in the CCSARP scheme. We agree with Sbisà (2001: 1812) that "[e]ach linguistic expression or textual strategy participating in the production of the illocutionary effect contributes in its own way to the overall physiognomy of the speech act".

Our corpus-based methodology, with its sociopragmatic annotation, allows one to track forms, functions and social contexts. We have not been able to demonstrate

the power of this methodology as much as we would have wished. Conventional indirect requestive strategies were rather low in frequency to allow distinct patterns to emerge. And we did not have space to explore the social contexts of imperative requests, both positive and negative. Nevertheless, our methodology has allowed us to identify pragmalinguistic patterns, as mentioned in the first paragraph of this section, which we could then link with the social contexts, including those associated with requests (e.g. the prototypical contextual and interpersonal beliefs). By using two genres, trial proceedings and drama, we have also had the opportunity to note the role of local contexts. For example, participants of high status in the trial data – including the man with the highest status possible (King Charles I) – utilized requestive strategies unsuccessfully because their personal power outside the courtroom was not recognized and/or was deemed to be irrelevant in this specific context. We also found that grounders were used infrequently in the trial data, and suggested that this may indicate a level of shared knowledge that made them less necessary in this context than in drama texts (where they might also serve an “informing” function). But note here that we have made assumptions about how pragmalinguistic strategies will be interpreted, in order to account for our patterns. We also did this at a more general level in our discussion, notably in section 9, where we have offered some hypotheses as to how, for example, imperatives may have been interpreted, suggesting that social distance was not valued, much as in Polish culture today, and pointing out that this is consistent with the notion of a “positive politeness culture”. However, much more research into sociopragmatic meanings is necessary, in order to substantiate such hypotheses.

Finally, it is worth noting that Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory, developed from, and for, present-day data, does not account for our Early Modern data, despite the fact that this theory was largely upheld by Brown and Gilman (1989).¹⁸ A scale of directness underpins this theory, such that more directness is associated with less politeness, yet in our data there is no clear evidence of such a scale in operation. Moreover, its predictions about degrees of directness and how they correlate with aspects of the social context are not borne out. Specifically, less power does not seem to correlate with the more indirect forms. Again, more research is needed here.

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18. They looked at an earlier period (i.e. that of Shakespeare) than we do, but this is unlikely to be the reason for the difference.

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An inventory of directives in Shakespeare's *King Lear**

Ulrich Busse

1. Introduction

With respect to polite requests, Brown and Gilman (1989), in their article on “politeness theory and Shakespeare’s four major tragedies”, complain that there are a number of good analyses of the imperative in Elizabethan English but very few on polite requests in the framework of speech act theory that separate “the grammatical imperative from directive speech acts” (1989: 179). For this reason, the present study will try to determine the relationships that hold between grammatical sentence types such as imperatives on the one hand, and their communicative functions as directive speech acts on the other. Thus, the underlying idea of the present paper is twofold:

1. By following the approach of a form-to-function mapping (see Jacobs and Jucker 1995: 13–18) the objective is to arrive at an ideally complete inventory of the linguistic forms which were available to Shakespeare and his contemporaries for carrying out directive speech acts. In order to do so, relevant reference works, including grammar books on Shakespeare’s language in particular, and on Early Modern English in general, will be investigated so as to gain an overview of existing forms. This preliminary inventory of linguistic forms will then be analysed in terms of discourse function(s) and with regard to the degree of politeness that is expressed.
2. The second part of the study will put the theoretical apparatus to the test by trying to account for the factors which may have led a speaker, and ultimately the dramatist, to select one construction rather than another in a given situation. To this end, *King Lear*, as the central person in the play, will serve as the focal point for the analysis of directive speech acts, the underlying working hypothesis being the following: as a tragic hero, Lear undergoes the most profound change in the microcosm of the play, both socially and mentally. He falls from powerful ruler to irrational, irate, and lunatic old man, and ends up as a most destitute human being. The ensuing dramatic or even climactic changes in social status, interpersonal relationships and emotional states of

* My thanks go to two anonymous reviewers for their suggestions and corrections. All remaining oversights and shortcomings are, of course, my own.

mind such as hubris, rage, madness, disillusionment and purification will have a clear bearing upon his choices and ways of carrying out directive speech acts.

In this respect, the paper provides a pragmatic analysis of a literary text within the framework of pragmaphilology (see Jacobs and Jucker 1995: 11–13).

In terms of the concept of politeness¹, the present study will make use of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory in a loose sense. Rather than using a detailed calculus, as Brown and Gilman (1989) did for their study, the different grammatical structures will first of all be investigated in a functional paradigm, and, in addition to this, linguistic clues to interpersonal relationships such as the use of pronouns, address forms, discourse markers, etc. will be taken into account. In order to evaluate the illocutionary force of a given construction the context in which it occurs also plays a major role. Thus, the methodology of the study at hand can be described as making use of both top-down and also bottom-up strategies.

2. Forms and functions

Givón (1993: 264) draws attention to the fact that “[t]he traditional generic label *imperative* covers a wide range of functionally-related speech-acts and grammatical constructions”. Therefore, it seems necessary to set up an inventory of grammatical sentence types which could be used in Early Modern English to perform directive speech acts. The different grammatical forms and constructions will be singled out with the help of reference works.

2.1 The Early Modern inventory of imperatives and related speech forms to express directives

In Shakespeare's day and in modern times as well, directives were often realized by means of imperative clauses. According to Blake (2002: sections 4.2.3, 4.3.3 and 7.2), in Shakespeare's English imperatives were more flexible in their syntax than their present-day English counterparts. In principle, they could be constructed along the following lines:

- “Imperatives are formed by the base form either of the verb alone or with a non-modal auxiliary, a pseudo-auxiliary like *come* or *go*, or *let*” (Blake 2002: 247).
- “The imperative, whether singular or plural [...] may be accompanied by *thou* or *thee*, *ye* or *you*” (2002: 93).
- Imperatives are often introduced by politeness markers such as *pray* or *prithée*.

1. For a discussion of recent linguistic research on politeness, which goes beyond the scope of this paper, see Watts et al. (2005), in particular pp. (xi–xlvii) and the introduction (pp. 1–17).

- Imperatives can also be formed by means of *do*-periphrasis “which may be emphatic, especially with negatives” (2002: 94).
- “An imperative with the formal appearance of a perfect, formed with the auxiliaries *have* or *be* exists, though the sense is of immediate force and differs only in emphasis from the normal imperative” (2002: 94).
- Imperatives can be formed with parts of speech other than verbs.

This gives rise to the following types, or combinations of types, each illustrated by an example taken from Blake²:

- (1) Plain imperative – verb alone: *Come! Go!* etc.
- (2) Verb + 2nd person pronoun: *come you to me at night* (*Merchant of Venice* 2.2.256–7)
- (3) Form of address + verb: *Toads stoole, lerne me the Proclamation* (*Troilus and Cressida* 2.1.21–2)
- (4) Discourse marker, verb: *We pray you throw to earth This vnpreuayling woe,* (*Hamlet* 1.2.106–7)
- (5) *Do* (not) verb: *Doe thou amend thy Face* (*The First Part of King Henry IV* 3.3.23).
- (6) Verb + *do*-tag: *Giue me your answer, yfaith doe* (*Henry V* 5.129–30)
- (7) Perfect auxiliary (*Have/be*): *haue done your foolishness,* (*Comedy of Errors* 1.2.72)
- (8) Verbless imperative: *Vp sword,* (*Hamlet* 3.3.88)

In a wider sense, the term “imperative” also embraces commands with first person plural subjects, which are often labelled as “adhortatives”. For Shakespeare’s language they can be represented by the following structures:

- (9) Lexical verb + *we*: *Then go we neare her* (*Much Ado About Nothing* 3.2.32)
Lexical verb + *us*: *And pawse vs, till these Rebels, now a-foot, Come vnderneath the yoake of Gouernment* (*The Second Part of King Henry IV* 4.3.9–10)
- (10) *Let* + 1st person plural + lexical verb: *let vs take our leaue* (*Two Gentlemen of Verona* 1.1.56)
Let + 1st person plural: *let vs hence* (*Much Ado About Nothing* 5.3.30)

Jussives express requests that are directed towards the third person singular or plural.

- (11) *Go some and follow him* (*Henry VIII* 1.4.61)

Another subclass of directives is formed by the so-called optative subjunctive, which expresses a wish or desire of the speaker that can be fulfilled.

2. In terms of spelling and punctuation, the citations below follow Blake’s (2002) grammar. In the following, if not noted otherwise, all quotations including those taken over from secondary sources are based on the *Riverside Shakespeare* (1997), edited by G. Blakemore Evans.

(12) *Let not Light see my black and deepes desires (Macbeth 1.4.51)*

As with the approach taken by Salmon (1965) in order to account for “sentence structures in Shakespearian colloquial English”, the inventory above could be regarded as an attempt to present a systematic statement about the range of possibilities that were available to Early Modern speakers, as represented by Shakespearean characters, to perform directive speech acts.³

2.2 Directive speech acts – a working definition

In the broadest sense, directives are speech acts by means of which the speaker requests the hearer(s) to do (or not to do) certain things. They are performed with the intention of committing the addressee to some future course of action in order to make the world fit the words via the hearer (see Searle 1969, 1976).

Directives embrace a number of different illocutionary acts such as: commanding, ordering, requesting, permitting/prohibiting, (dis-)allowing, begging, pleading, supplicating, inviting, recommending, etc. In formal terms, they can be realised by imperatives and subjunctives. Furthermore, indirect requests can be expressed by interrogatives and declaratives (see section 2.5).

2.3 Directive speech acts and their illocutionary force

The preceding presentation of different imperative and subjunctive sentence types (see section 2.1) shows that the illocutionary force of directive speech acts varies. In addition, they can be used for quite a number of illocutionary acts, ranging from order or command to plea, advice, offer, suggestion, wish, etc. Therefore, before we can begin with the textual analysis it seems mandatory to discuss the different constructions in terms of directness and their potential to threaten the face of the addressee.

“Directives”, or “manipulative speech acts” as Givón (1993: 264) calls them, “are verbal acts through which the speaker attempts to get the hearer to act”. The attempt of the speaker to make the world fit the words via the hearer collides with the negative face wants of the addressee. By “negative face”, Brown and Levinson understand the need to be independent, to have freedom of action, and not to be imposed on by others. Thus, directives threaten “the basic claims to the territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction – i.e. freedom of action and freedom from imposition” (1987: 61).

Givón argues that “[t]he balance of status, power, obligation or entitlement between the two participants determines the exact manipulative construction to be used. Questions of politeness, propriety, respect, and fear – or potential social consequences

3. In going through the text of *King Lear*, probably not all of the structures discussed will be present, and perhaps a few more doubtful or arguable cases will make matters more difficult than anticipated.

of improper usage – are all germane to the choice of a manipulative construction” (1993: 265). According to Givón, these factors enter into the following predictable relationships. If the speaker has a higher social status or is more powerful than the hearer then the hearer’s obligation to comply is greater, and, on the other hand, there is less need for the speaker to be deferent. If, vice versa, the hearer has a higher social status or is more powerful, this entails that the hearer’s obligation to comply is lower, and that the speaker’s need to be deferent is greater.

While these correlations are general or perhaps even universal,

a vast array of intimate, culture-specific conventions determine the proper use of manipulative constructions in any particular language [at any specific point in time; my addition, U.B.]. In this domain, the grammar of verbal manipulation shades gradually into the grammar of deference on the one hand, and of epistemic certainty on the other (Givón 1993: 265).

Apart from the personal (horizontal distance) and social relationships (vertical distance) between the interlocutors – as outlined above – the weightiness of the face-threatening act is also a factor which is of general importance. Thus, politeness theory (see Brown and Levinson 1987) claims that the three variables of

1. Power (P): the social status, station or rank of a speaker
2. Distance (D): horizontal social distance or closeness between speaker and hearer
3. Ranked extremity (R): the weight of the imposition

determine the choice of a certain strategy.

In order to show the scalar properties and the decreasing manipulative strength, Givón provides the following examples from Present-day English, arranged from highest to lowest manipulative strength. The poles of this scale are marked by an imperative bald on record as in (a.) and by a polite indirect question as in (f.):

highest manipulative strength

- a. Get up!
- b. Get up, will you.
- c. Would you please get up?
- d. Would you mind getting up?
- e. Do you think you could get up?
- f. Would you mind if I asked you to get up?

lowest manipulative strength

(Givón 1993: 265)

The directives above show that the manipulative strength or the face-threatening potential can be systematically weakened or decreased by the following linguistic devices:

- a. increased length
- b. the use of question forms
- c. explicit mention of the manipulee pronoun (*you*)

- d. use of irrealis modality on the verb
- e. use of negative form
- f. embedding the manipulative clause under the scope of a modality or cognition verb
(Givón 1993: 266)

“[M]odals, conditionals, questions, irrealis markers and other devices can be used systematically to weaken manipulative speech-acts. Such devices make the manipulation less direct, less forceful, less authoritarian, more polite. With the use of such devices, the imperative may gradually shade into request, plea, begging, suggestion, or a weak expression of preference” (Givón 1993: 268). Considering this, we will now scrutinise the inventory of different grammatical constructions, as presented in section 2.1, in terms of factors which soften the directive.

2.4 The communicative functions and the manipulative strength of imperative clauses

As imperatives typically urge the addressee to do something (or not to do something) after the moment of speaking, the imperative clause usually has no subject, makes use of a main verb or an auxiliary in the base form followed by a main verb, and lacks tense and modal specification. The progressive and, even more so, the perfective, are rare (see Quirk et al. 1985: 827; Givón 1993: 266f; Biber et al. 1999: 219).

Doing an act baldly, without redress, involves doing it in the most direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way possible. This implies the simple straightforward structure of *Do X* (see Brown and Levinson 1987: 69).

In terms of politeness, in Present-day English and also in Early Modern English, direct commands, and even more so, verbless imperatives such as *Out!*, *Away!*, *This way!* sound brusque and abrupt and are hence often considered as impolite.⁴ Brown and Gilman (1989: 183), for instance, regard verbless imperatives such as “Peace, Kent!” as “not polite and not neutral but rudely brusque”.

Speech acts which employ bald on record strategies are usually avoided in everyday conversation because they directly threaten the face of the addressee. They are appropriate, however, in situations demanding brevity, definiteness and prompt action due to urgency, as, for instance, in military commands or in emergency messages.

In contrast to orders or commands which threaten the negative face of the hearer restricting his or her freedom from imposition, advice or warning and, even more so, offers or invitations may be classified as instances of positive politeness. From the speaker’s point of view, they show the speaker’s care for the interests of the hearer. On the part of the hearer, they can be interpreted as beneficial (see Kopytko 1993: 81). It follows then, that sentences that are imperative in form, such as (1) below, but which

4. For Early Modern English see Burton (1973).

tell somebody to do something for their own good are not impolite at all. Furthermore, this example clearly shows that “we should be aware that illocutionary force depends in most cases on the situational context” (Quirk et al. 1985: 831).

(1) Lear [To the Fool]: In, boy, go first (*King Lear* 3.4.26)

Negative commands have the effect of forbidding or prohibiting an action. In terms of directness, Givón (1993: 267) is of the opinion that they are roughly equivalent to other imperatives.

To tone down the brusqueness or even harshness of orders, Present-day English speakers often make use of politeness markers such as *please* in directive utterances. In speech, these are usually accompanied by a rising intonation. The word *please* used on its own did not yet exist in the early seventeenth century, only longer forms were used such as *An(d) please you*, *If it please you*, etc. The most frequently used politeness markers or courtesy subjuncts were *(I) pray (you)* and *prithee*.⁵

In Present-day English imperative clauses, the addressee, i.e. the person who is to obey the command, may also be specified by means of a personal pronoun, an indefinite pronoun, or by a vocative. Whether the addition of pronouns or vocatives is meant to single out the individual, to soften or rather to emphasize the command depends on the circumstances and, in spoken language, on the intonation pattern.⁶

For the Early Modern period, Millward (1966) has studied “Pronominal case in Shakespearean imperatives” on the basis of Kökeritz’ facsimile edition of the *First Folio* (1954), coming to the following results on pronominal use with second-person imperatives. The pronoun may be in the subjective or objective case (for *thee/thou*) or it may be absent. No case distinction could be observed between *ye* and *you*. In all of Shakespeare’s plays, there are 35 imperatives with *ye* and more than 500 involving *you* ([1966]1987: 301). On the other hand, there are 200 imperatives with *thou*. Approximately the same number of imperatives with *thee* occurs, and 56 different verbs are used. Only 17 verbs appear with both *thou* and *thee*, “the use of *thou* or *thee* is, in almost all instances, conditioned by other factors in the sentence” ([1966]1987: 302).⁷ She concludes that *thou* as the subject of an imperative “is employed to provide a

5. For an analysis of *pray you* and *prithee* as discourse markers in the Shakespeare Corpus see Busse (2002: 187-212).

6. In Present-day English, noncontrastive *you* is often admonitory and expresses strong irritation or insistence, as in “You 'show me what to DÒ [...]” On the other hand, noncontrastive *you* may be persuasive: “I know you can do it if you try hard enough. 'You 'show me what you can DÒ” (Quirk et al. 1985: 828). According to Quirk et al. “[v]ocative *you*, as opposed to imperative subject *you*, is very impolite: YÖU | 'come HÈRE]”.

7. The fact that sentence types (or rather discourse functions?) could have a bearing on the choice of pronouns has already been pointed out by Abbott ([1870] 1966: 158, § 234): “*Thou* is often used in statements and requests, while *you* is used in conditional and other sentences where there is no direct appeal to the person addressed.”

mildly emphatic tone to the imperative. In verse, it is useful for metrical purposes. Its use (as is the use of *you*) seems to be optional” ([1966] 1987: 302).

Quirk ([1974]1987: 9) confirms Millward’s interpretation of *thou* as emphatic beside an unmarked imperative without any pronoun, adding that the oblique form [*thee*] seeks the “personal involvement of the addressee” ([1974]1987: 10) as in the example below:

- (2) Polonius [To Laertes]: Farewell, my blessing season this in thee! (*Hamlet* 1.3.81)

Quirk sums up his argument by saying that today we generally have difficulty responding to the distinction between *thou/you* and that this is particularly true for their distribution in imperatives. For this he gives an example where three possibilities co-occur with the same verb:

- (3) a Clarence [To 2. Murderer]: Come thou on my side, [...] (*Richard III* 1.4.265)
 b. Antony [To Scarus]: Come thee on (*Antony and Cleopatra* 4.7.16)
 c. Caesar [To Antony]: Come on my right hand, [...] (*Julius Caesar* 1.2.213)

In terms of politeness, Brown and Gilman (1989: 182) are of the opinion that imperatives followed by the second-person subject such as *Go you*, *Retire thee*, *Take thou* are more polite than simple imperatives, “but it is not quite clear which should be considered the neutral baseline”. Therefore, they have decided to treat both as neutral and not to regard the form followed by a second-person pronoun as more deferential.

Nowadays, one way to tone down the imperative force of a command is to use a rising or fall-rise tone, to add the courtesy subjunct *please*, the tag question *won’t you*, the auxiliary *do*, or the adverb *just*. Blake’s list of imperative types used in Shakespeare’s language shows that constructions involving *Do (not) VERB* and *VERB + do-tag* also existed in Early Modern English. However, we have to take into consideration that *do* did not yet have the same functions as in Present-day English, but Blake (2002: 94) says that *do*-periphrasis may be emphatic, especially with negatives. For the investigation of literary language in drama, we also need to pay attention to the fact that, at least in verse, a *do*-form might also serve metrical purposes in adding an extra syllable (see also section 3.1).

In a wider sense, the term “imperative” also embraces commands with first-person plural subjects, which are often labelled as “adhortatives”, and those involving third-person singular or plural subjects, often termed “jussives”. According to Faiss (1989: 231), adhortatives of the type *let us...*, or the grammaticalized form *let’s* have their origin in the second half of the fourteenth century. They replace older subjunctive constructions such as *go we*, which were still frequent in Shakespeare’s language and which survived in literary language until the nineteenth century.

Adhortatives are addressed to the hearer, but they also include the speaker, thus suggesting a joint course of action. Blake (2002: 94) mentions that “[w]hen *let* is used with other persons [than the first-person plural], there is less sense of command” as in:

- (4) Ariel [To Prospero]: Let me remember thee what thou hast promis'd, [...] (*The Tempest* 1.2.243)
- (5) Escalus [To Angelo]: Let but your honour know [...] (*Measure For Measure* 2.1.8)

In terms of politeness theory, the inclusive form embracing both the speaker and the hearer can be classified as substrategy twelve in Brown and Levinson's (1987) inventory of strategies: “Include both speaker and hearer in the activity.” Hence, according to Kopytko (1995: 522), example (6) below signals intimacy and a good, cooperative relationship between the interlocutors, often redressing face threatening acts.

- (6) Horatio [To Barnardo and Marcellus] Well, sit we down, / And let us hear Barnardo speak of this (*Hamlet* 1.1.33–34; cited in Kopytko 1995: 522)

Jussives express requests that are directed towards the third-person singular or plural. They purport “to elicit the action of a third person, rather than the hearer” (Givón 1993: 267). They are frequently expressed with *let*. Givón goes on to give a functional explanation:

The origin of this construction is transparently as an imperative form of the manipulative verb ‘let’ [...]. But it does not necessarily involve directing the hearer to either take action, make a third person take action, or allow the third person to take action. This is clear from the fact that there may be no hearer present, or that the hearer may have no control over the third-person subject of the exhortative clause. (Givón 1993: 268)

As illustration, he provides the following examples, (7)-(9), which seem “to be an expression of preference, oath, or resignation towards states or events. This explains the compatibility of stative clauses, non-agentive constructions or even agentless passives with the jussive construction” (Givón 1993: 268).

- (7) Let Congress rot in Washington till Christmas then!
- (8) Let the storm rage, who cares!
- (9) Let time take its inevitable course.

With regard to Shakespeare's language, Blake points out that "[t]hird person imperatives are frequently expressed with *let*. Constructions without *let* mostly occur with noun subjects, though some of these examples may be optative subjunctives" (2002: 113).⁸

Another subclass of directives is formed by the so-called optative subjunctive, which some authors also term the "optative imperative" (see Burton 1973). Thus, e.g. Brown and Gilman (1989: 181) argue that an optative imperative is similar to a direct imperative as the same felicity conditions hold, since both assert the speaker's sincere wish that the hearer do *X*: "Whether the operative word is *may* or *let* or *that*, the sense is always the same and, except for the levels of deference expressed, equivalent to 'I would that *X* be done'. They give the following examples from Shakespeare's tragedies:

- (10) Macbeth [Aside]: Let not light see my black and deep desires; [...] (*Macbeth* 1.4.51)
- (11) Hamlet [Alone]: O that this too too sallied flesh would melt, [...] (*Hamlet* 1.2.129)
- (12) Emilia [To Othello]: If he [Iago] say so, may his pernicious soul / Rot half a grain a day! (*Othello* 5.2.155–6; all cited in Brown and Gilman 1989: 181)

In examples (10)–(12) above, the addressees are not directly involved in what is being asked for. The subjunctive mood turns these directives from the factual state of affairs into a hypothetical one. For this reason it can be argued that such requests should not be considered as imperatives but rather as exclamations, wishes or desires.

In summary, we can state that the illocutionary force of imperatives varies because, as shown in this section, they can be used for quite a number of illocutionary acts. "It is not, however, always possible to make precise distinctions because the illocutionary force depends on the relative authority of speaker and hearer and on the relative benefits of the action to each [...] and] in most cases on the situational context" (Quirk et al. 1985: 831).

2.5 Indirect speech acts

Directives can, of course, also be rendered by sentence types other than canonical imperative clauses and related constructions such as adhortatives, jussives, and optative subjunctives. One way of doing so is to make a request rather than a command in the form of an interrogative sentence, asking for the cooperativeness of the addressee and whether he or she is willing or able to comply with the demand. In modern English,

8. According to Visser, the types "*Cume se blinda to me*" and "*Take every man a vizard*" express "a wish in the form of an exhortation, command, regulation, request, advice, encouragement, etc." (1966: 801, § 846). However, he also admits that there is no sharp dividing line between this usage and those cases "expressing a wish whose realization depended on conditions beyond the speaker's power or control" [see § 841] [...], so that the inclusion of a number of instances in this section is merely arbitrary" (1966: 801, § 846).

indirect speech acts of the type *Can you pass the salt?* are the most frequent type of conventional indirectness.

Givón (1993: 269) provides the following somewhat simplified but, for our present purposes, sufficient definition of indirect speech acts: "An indirect speech-act is a construction used to perform one speech-act even though its grammatical form is more commonly associated with another speech-act". For directive speech acts, this gives way to a continuum from the most prototypical imperative: *Pass the salt!* to the most prototypical interrogative: *Was there any salt there?* There is also a continuum spanning from the most prototypical imperative: *Wash the dishes!* to the most prototypical declarative still permitting an imperative interpretation: *The dishes are dirty* (see Givón 1993: 270f). Thus, syntactically polite indirect requests gradually shade into interrogatives and declaratives.

Brown and Gilman (1989: 181) state that "the polite forms most often heard today, the subjunctive interrogatives such as *Could you* and *Would you*" are completely absent from their sample of four of Shakespeare's tragedies, and that on the authority of Millward (personal communication) these were not invented until the nineteenth century. However, Kopytko (1993: 84f) states that Shakespeare made use of this type, but did not employ this strategy often. Kopytko gives the following examples:

- (13) Brutus: Canst thou hold up thy heavy eyes awhile, / And touch thy instrument a strain or two?
Lucius [his boy servant]: Ay, my lord, an't please you. (*Julius Caesar* 4.3.256–8).
- (14) Gobbo [to Launcelot]: Can you tell me whether one Launcelot, that / dwells with him, dwell with him or no? (*Merchant of Venice* 2.2.46–7)

Brown and Gilman (1989: 181) claim that in Shakespeare's tragedies, "indirect requests [*sic*] use such phrases as: *I do beseech you, I entreat you, I pray you, Pray you, Prithee, I do require that, So please your Majesty, If you will give me leave [...]*".

The term "indirect" in connection with indirect speech acts is, however, a bit misleading because, syntactically, constructions involving speech act verbs such as *beseech, entreat* and *pray* are polite requests, but nonetheless imperative clauses. They are more polite than a bare imperative because they call attention to a felicity condition by asserting it: "Speaker sincerely wants hearer to do X" (Brown and Gilman 1989: 181). Although the constructions above clearly vary in the amount of deference shown to the addressee, what they all have in common is that they either imply (as in *Do X!* by means of conventional conversational implicature) or directly express sincere speaker/writer volition (as in *I would that ...*).

By contrast, the second group of "indirect requests" concerns a felicity condition in the hearer, in that these requests invoke or mention willingness on the part of the addressee:

They ask not whether the hearer *could* or *would* do something, but rather if the hearer *is willing, sees fit, or is pleased* to do something. [...] willingness on the part

of the hearer is a felicity condition for the direct imperative and asking about such willingness is a way of saying *Do X* indirectly (Brown and Gilman 1989: 181f).

In Shakespeare's tragedies, they are typically realized by phrases such as: *An(d) please you, If it please you, May it please you, or If you please.*

To my mind, in order to avoid terminological ambiguity, only these latter constructions which either question or assert felicity conditions such as permission or obligation in the hearer should be termed "indirect requests".

3. Shakespearean directives – methodological problems

As shown in the preceding sections, the label "directive" covers a range of partly different, but functionally related speech acts, which in turn can be expressed by a spectrum of different grammatical constructions. However, in practice it can be difficult to separate an imperative from a subjunctive. In his Shakespeare grammar, Blake (2002) addresses this problem as follows:

The base form of the verb is [...] used for the infinitive, the first [person] singular and all plural persons of the present indicative, all forms of the present subjunctive, and the imperative. It may, consequently, be difficult to decide whether a particular example is imperative, infinitive or subjunctive, particularly as the imperative can take a subject like *thou*. Modern editors reach different conclusions, for the punctuation in F[olio] may not be helpful in elucidating the grammar. (Blake 2002: 93)

He illustrates this difficulty with the following examples:

- (1) *Breake we our Watch vp (Hamlet 1.1.149).*
- (2) *Pray heauen she win him (Measure for Measure 2.2.128).*
- (3) *I pray heauen make thee new (Richard II 5.3.144).*

In his opinion, (1) "can be either an imperative or more probably a hortative subjunctive" (Blake 2002: 93). In (2) "*win* follows *she* and is evidently subjunctive". In (3) "*make* may be an infinitive if we compare it with *I pray Your Highnesse to assigne our Triall day (Richard II 1.1.150–1)*" (2002: 93). From the discussion of these (and similar) examples he concludes that the punctuation "will colour our perception of the participants and how the scene is understood" (2002: 94). By paying attention to these caveats, methodologically it seems advisable to use a modern edition alongside an old spelling edition.

3.1 Shakespeare's dramatic language and the problem of verisimilitude

The carefully constructed language of Shakespearean drama cannot be regarded as a true representation of authentic spoken Early Modern English, and, with the availabil-

ity of modern computerised corpora, Brown and Gilman's (1989: 170) argument in support of using plays in order to test the claims of politeness theory "[p]rimarily because there is nothing else" is no longer valid. However, Salmon's (1965) reasoning for using plays, even if it is some forty years old, is still convincing: the language we find in dramatic texts was written as a representation of spoken language arising spontaneously from a given situation. "It is, of course, a selective and inadequate representation of speech; but the more skilful the dramatist, the more skilful he will be, if presenting the normal life of his time, in authenticating the action by an acceptable version of contemporary speech" (Salmon [1965]1987: 265). She goes on to say that "all those features of language which indicate one speaker's awareness of another, and his linguistic reactions to given situations, will undoubtedly be present. These are the structures which correspond in language to questions, commands and exclamations in the situation [...]" (Salmon [1965]1987: 266). Among the typical features of spoken language she mentions "for example, formulae for greetings and farewells, for thanking, for handing something to another person, for calling someone" (Salmon [1965]1987: 266). The only possible pitfalls to which she draws our attention are that verse and also rhetorical prose can have an effect on language structures in that formality seems to favour the "use of the longer-established of a pair of free variants, e.g. *V + NP?* rather than *Do + NP + VN?*" ([1965]1987: 267).

4. Corpus study: *King Lear's* directive speech acts

As we have seen, directive speech acts can be classified as attempts to induce the hearer to some course of action. Whether a speaker makes his or her command or request as short and unambiguous as possible, or whether he or she adorns it with epithets or resorts to indirect speech acts depends on a number of factors.

4.1 Analysis of *King Lear* Act I

4.1.1 *Scene 1 "The state division scene" (1.1.34–266)*

Lear, King of Britain, has divided his realm between his three daughters, but he has not fully revealed his entire plan to either his closest advisers, the Earl of Kent and the Earl of Gloucester, or to his daughters and their husbands.

The whole event has been stage-managed by the king. He wants to be in the limelight and expects that all participants follow his orders. His elevated social position, linguistically signalled by the prerogative of the royal *we* ("Mean time we shall express our darker purpose" 1.1.36), the formal setting at his court, and his expectation that "our fast intent" (1.1.38) will be executed, do not induce Lear to pay any attention to other people's face wants. Therefore, Lear need not care about linguistic politeness because politeness, in the words of Brown and Gilman, "means putting things in such

a way as to take account of the feelings of the hearer” (1989: 161). The procedure of dividing his realm begins in a neutral style by giving short and unequivocal orders to his advisers (see 1 below). The language can be characterised as neither polite nor impolite, but as matter-of-fact and business-like. The canonical imperatives are not adorned by honorifics.

- (1) Lear: Attend the lords of France and Burgundy, / Gloucester.
 Gloucester: I shall, my lord. Exit [with Edmund].
 ...
 Lear: [probably to Kent]: Give me the map there.
 [probably to all present]: Know, that we have divided / In three our kingdom;
 and 'tis our fast intent / To shake all cares and business from our age, [...].

In the following “love contest”, Lear demands that his three daughters make competitive protestations of their love for him, but “the love contest that follows is a sham and not really meant to determine who gets what share” (Halio 1992: 95, footnote), since Lear has already premeditated that his kingdom shall not be divided equally among his three daughters and that he wants to favour Cordelia, his youngest daughter (see quotations 2 and 5).

- (2) Lear: Tell me, my daughters [...] / Which of you shall we say doth love us most, / That we our largest bounty may extend [...]?
- (3) Lear: Goneril, / Our eldest-born, speak first.
 Goneril: [expected reply]
 [...]
 Lear: We make thee lady. To thine and Albany's [issue] / Be this perpetual.
- (4) Lear: What says our second daughter, / Our dearest Regan, wife of Cornwall?
 [Speak.]
 Regan: [expected reply]
 Lear: To thee and thine hereditary ever / Remain this ample third of our fair kingdom [...].
- (5) Lear: Now, our joy, / Although our last and least, to whose young love / The vines of France and milk of Burgundy / Strive to be interest'd, what can you say to draw / A third more opulent than your sisters'? Speak.⁹
 Cordelia: [unexpected reply] Nothing, my lord.
 Lear: Nothing?
 Cordelia: Nothing.
 Lear: Nothing will come of nothing, speak again.

9. In a footnote to the plain imperative *Speak*, Halio (1992: 100) mentions that Cordelia's first response may have been silence as indicated in her previous aside “What shall Cordelia speak? Love, and be silent” (1.1.57).

Cordelia: Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave / My heart into my mouth. I love your Majesty / According to my bond, no more nor less.

Lear: How, how, Cordelia? Mend your speech a little, / Lest you may mar your fortunes.

[Several exchanges between Lear and Cordelia. Cordelia's statements do not please Lear]

Lear: Let it be so: thy truth then be thy dow'r! [...]. Here I disclaim all my paternal care, [...]. Hold thee from this for ever.

[...]

Hence¹⁰, and avoid / my sight!

[...]

Cordelia: I yet beseech your Majesty – [...] that you make known [...] / That hath depriv'd me of your grace and favor, [...].

Lear: Better thou / Hadst not been born than not t' have pleas'd me better.

The quotations above show that the way in which Lear goes about requesting protestations of love from his three daughters is different. Goneril is addressed by a simple imperative preceded by a form of address. However, to Regan and Cordelia he puts questions.¹¹ These questions are only grammatically interrogative. In terms of speech acts, they should be regarded as polite indirect requests.¹² In Lear's elaborate introduction, with the very positive epithets by means of which he characterises Cordelia, it becomes clear that he favours her most. However, her honest but blunt reply stuns him. He explains that “[n]othing will come from nothing” and invites her, by an imperative, to correct her answer. As her second answer irritates him, he requests her, still politely, to “mend your speech a little”, but in essence her answer is still the same. With rising anger and withdrawal of affection, Lear reacts brusquely with a plain imperative and, finally, with a verbless imperative. Cordelia's very deferential request (emphasizing her sincerity) that the reasons for her fall from grace be made known does not have any effect. Lear remains firm. His answer reveals that all his speech acts were carried out so as to please him. The speech acts of his two elder daughters met his expectations, but those of Cordelia did not.

Lear quickly resumes his terse style when he calls on his attendants to carry out orders and when he addresses his sons-in-law:

10. *Hence* is a verbless imperative meaning as much as ‘get away, leave’. It is addressed to Cordelia, who disobeys (see Halio 192: 102).

11. Brown and Gilman (1989: 182) are mistaken in that they claim that Lear uses simple imperatives to both Goneril and Regan, and only questions Cordelia.

12. “As a speech act it [the question ‘What can you say?’] is a directive or command having the exact sense of the subsequent imperative ‘Speak’. The question asks about a felicity condition on speaking-so-as-to-win-a-more-opulent-third. [...]. In inquiring about a felicity condition, it becomes an indirect or polite request” (Brown and Gilman 1989: 182).

- (6) Lear [to Kent or to attendants?] Call France. Who stirs? / Call Burgundy.
Cornwall and Albany, / With my two daughters' dow'rs digest the third; / Let
pride, which she calls plainness, marry her. /
[To France and Burgundy] I do invest you jointly with my power, [...].
The sway, revenue, execution of the rest, / Beloved sons, be yours, which to
confirm, / This coronet part between you.

In (7), the Earl of Kent tries to tell the king that, in making his rash decision, he has made a bad mistake. He couches his advice in a very respectful form of address, but is rebuked immediately with a verbless imperative, which shows that Lear, who compares himself to a dragon, is very angry. Kent carries on in deferential style. In reply, Lear resorts to an off-record strategy by using the metaphor of the bent bow followed by a plain imperative. Literally, the imperative *make from* means 'let go'. Critics, however, are divided in their interpretation of this imperative. On the one hand, it could refer to Kent's elaborate and somewhat long-winded speech and hence be regarded as a sign of impatience, the king wanting Kent to get to the point. On the other hand, Halio (1992: 103, footnote) points out that some commentators "interpret the passage differently and gloss 'make from' as 'avoid', i.e. get out of the way of (the arrow of) my anger" (see also Muir 1994 and *Riverside Shakespeare* 1997). Seen this way, the imperative serves the communicative function of giving advice or a mild warning.

- (7) Kent: Good my liege – /
Lear: Peace, Kent! / Come not between the dragon and his wrath; [...].
[...]
Kent: Royal Lear, / Whom I have ever honor'd as my king, / Lov'd as my father,
as my master follow'd, / As my great patron thought on in my prayers –
Lear: The bow is bent and drawn, make from the / shaft.

In any case, Kent has received the message, but insists on telling the king the unpleasant truth (see 8 below). Now he exchanges the elaborate diction of his respectful protest for unmannerly liberties when he directly accuses the king of madness and addresses him accordingly by *thou* and *old man*. "Kent changes his idiom to direct, blunt address, using the familiar second-person pronoun, appropriate only to subordinates and children, and an appellation ('old man') that is stunning in its impudence" (Halio 1992: 103, footnote).

Lear does not recognise either plainness or honesty, but feels deeply insulted by the insubordination of his retainer and reacts accordingly. Lear retorts by giving a sequence of orders in the form of verbless imperatives. Since Kent, like Cordelia earlier on, disobeys his command to get out of his sight, Lear uses another verbless imperative "Now by Apollo –" and lends it additional force by invoking Apollo. Not only does Kent disobey, but he also interrupts him. Therefore, Lear vents his anger with the abusive exclamatives "O vassal! Miscreant!" and then banishes him by beginning his

speech with an imperative followed by an abusive vocative (*recreant*) and ending it again with a verbless imperative (*Away*).

- (8) Kent: Let it fall rather, though the fork invade / The region of my heart; be Kent unmannerly / When Lear is mad. What wouldest thou do, old man? [...]. When majesty falls to folly. Reserve thy state, / And in thy best consideration check / This hideous rashness. Answer my life my judgment [...].
Lear: Kent, on thy life, no more.
... [Exclamatives, abusive vocatives]
Out of my sight!
... [Like Cordelia, Kent disobeys Lear's command to get out]
Hear me, recreant, / On thine allegiance, hear me! [...] take thy reward [...]
Away! By Jupiter, / This shall not be revok'd.
Kent: Fare thee well, King; sith thus thou wilt / appear, [...].

Now that Lear has disinherited Cordelia and banished Kent he is uncertain about the intentions of her two suitors (see quotation 9 below). He wants to know whether the Duke of Burgundy and the King of France are still interested in marrying her. Thus, the ensuing discourse between Lear and the Duke of Burgundy is dominated by interrogatives rather than directives. The Duke of Burgundy tells Lear that under the new terms that have been set out he is no longer interested in marrying Cordelia. As a reaction to this, Lear issues a short imperative and then addresses the King of France by giving him a piece of advice in the form of a polite request "[I] beseech you [...]". For the first time in the play, he does not speak as a sovereign, but as a deeply disappointed father. In terms of honorifics, this speech is more polite than necessary. This could indicate that the ultimate motivation for Lear's speech is revenge on Cordelia and the desire to hurt her, rather than true concern for her suitor's happiness; i.e. to prevent him from putting his affections on the unworthy Cordelia. However, the King of France reacts against Lear's "advice", and therefore receives a much colder statement: "Thou hast her, France." Cordelia is addressed by the final unfriendly imperative "be gone". By contrast, Lear invites Burgundy, who previously turned down Cordelia, to come along with him.

- (9) Burgundy: Pardon me, royal sir, / Election makes not up in such conditions.
Lear: Then leave her, sir¹³, for by the pow'r that / made me, / I tell you all her wealth.
[To France]: For you, great / King, / I would not from your love make such a stray / To match you where I hate; therefore beseech you / T'avert your liking a more worthier way / Than on a wretch whom Nature is ashamed / Almost t'acknowledge hers.
[...]

13. In his previous questions Lear used more deferential titles: "My Lord of Burgundy" and "Right noble Burgundy".

Burgundy: Royal King, / Give but that portion which yourself propos'd, / And here I take Cordelia by the hand, / Duchess of Burgundy.

Lear: Nothing. I have sworn. I am firm.

[...]

France: Thy dow'rless daughter, King, thrown to my chance, / Is queen of us, of ours, and our fair France. [...]

Lear: Thou hast her, France, let her be thine [...]. [To Cordelia] Therefore be gone, / Without our grace, our love, our benison. – Come, noble Burgundy.

4.1.2 Act I, Scene 4 “Lear and his fool” (105–117; 163–181)

The following dialogue between Lear and his fool shows that, to a certain extent, the fool can take liberties with his master that other persons cannot. This is seen in Lear’s affectionate address to the fool as *my boy* and the address of the fool to Lear as *nuncle*, a contraction of *mine uncle*. In addition, the fool takes the licence of calling Lear *sirrah* and saying *prithie* to him. However, Lear clearly holds the reins, seen in his warning that the fool will be whipped if he goes too far out of line.

(10) Fool: [...] Would I had two coxcombs and two daughters!

Lear: Why, my boy?

Fool: If I gave them all my living, I’d keep my / coxcombs myself. There’s mine; beg another of thy / daughters.

Lear: Take heed, sirrah – the whip.

Fool: Truth’s a dog must to kennel, he must be whipt out, when the Lady Brach may stand by th’ fire / and stink.

Lear: A pestilent gall to me!

Fool: Sirrah, I’ll teach thee a speech.

Lear: Do.

Fool: Mark it, nuncle: [...].

[...]

Fool: If I / speak like myself in this, let him be whipt that first / finds it so.

[...]

Fool: Prithie, nuncle, keep a schoolmaster that can teach thy Fool to lie – I would fain learn to lie.

Lear: And you lie, sirrah, we’ll have you whipt.

4.1.3 Act I, scene 4: “Lear and Goneril” (236–278)

Goneril makes one of the most outwardly polite speeches to Lear (see 11 below). First of all, she appeals to him not to misunderstand her and calls on his age and wisdom, but then the weight of the imposition becomes clear. She desires that he reduce his train, and at the same time threatens that she will take matters into her own hands if he does not comply. Lear reacts to this bold behaviour with an outbreak of anger. He

curse her and issues short impatient commands to his servants, who do not react immediately, so that he must order them again.

As Lear's passion rises, he loses his patience and releases a venomous outburst against Goneril, epitomised in his invocation of nature to make her sterile. Probably because he no longer has power over her to issue directives, he appeals to nature and commands her to punish Goneril.

(11) Lear: Your name, fair gentlewoman?

Goneril: This admiration, sir, is much o' th' savor / Of other your new pranks. I do beseech you / To understand my purposes aright, / As you are old and reverend, should be wise.

[...]

Be then desir'd / By her, that else will take the thing she begs, / A little to disquantity your train, [...].

Lear: Darkness and devils! / Saddle my horses; call my train together! / Degenerate bastard, I'll not trouble thee; / Yet have I left a daughter.

[...]

Albany: Pray, sir, be patient.

Lear [To Goneril]: Detested kite [...].

[...]

Lear [to his servants]: Go, go, my people.

[...]

Lear: [...] Hear, Nature, hear, dear goddess, hear! / Suspend thy purpose, if thou didst intend / To make this creature fruitful. / Into her womb convey sterility [...].

4.1.4 Summary

In the "state division scene", Lear is about to give his kingdom away to his three daughters, but his behaviour throughout the entire scene clearly shows that he acts and speaks as if he were still the king. His dialogues are directed to three groups of persons: his advisers and attendants, the Earl of Kent in particular; his three daughters; and the two suitors of his youngest daughter Cordelia, namely the Duke of Burgundy, and the King of France.

In each case, he usually gives orders and expects obedience. Non-compliance or uninvited pieces of advice are regarded as signs of disobedience, which raise anger and even wrath. In general, the canonical, straightforward imperative is the predominant sentence type of King Lear. Due to his supreme social position and his self-centredness, politeness and face work are not very important for him.

The discourse between Lear and Goneril can be interpreted as a loss of authority because one requirement for ensuring that directives are carried out felicitously is to be in a position of authority or power. Since Lear has relinquished his crown, he is no longer in such a position. Therefore, his condemnation of Goneril and his infuriated appeal to nature make him seem helpless.

4.2. Analysis of Act II

4.2.1 Scene 4 “*Lear and Regan*” (88–119; 133–182; 188–271)

Having been dismissed from Goneril’s home, Lear and his retainers now arrive at Regan’s place, intending to stay there. They are not well received. Gloucester reports that Regan and the Duke of Cornwall refuse to speak with Lear, infuriating the king with what he sees as inappropriate behaviour. He therefore advises Gloucester with an imperative: “Fetch me a better answer.” In addition, upon realising that Regan and Cornwall have arrested his messenger (the disguised Kent), Lear reacts with a sequence of impatient imperatives ending in a threat (see 12 below). To calm his rising passion he speaks to himself “My rising heart! But down.” Kent is set to liberty as they enter and Lear bitterly complains about the ill treatment he had received from Goneril and tries to win the favour of his second daughter.

- (12) Lear [to Gloucester]: Give me my servant forth. / Go tell the Duke, and ’s wife,
I’ld speak with them – / Now, presently. Bid them come forth and hear me, /
Or at their chamber-door I’ll beat the drum / Till it cry sleep to death.

With the “disappointment” of Goneril behind him, Lear is now much more polite and tactful with Regan when elaborating his wishes (see 13 below). Firstly, he uses positive adjectives and flatters her: “thy sister’s naught.” Regan explains to Lear that he should return to Goneril. She addresses him as *sir*, uses the polite request formula *I pray you*, and advises him to ask forgiveness. Lear seems to be stunned by this unexpected reaction, but, unlike in earlier situations, he does not answer with an exclamation or an indignant imperative but assumes a stance of verbal and bodily supplication as he kneels and begs, but in fact he is hurt and angry and therefore sarcastic. Halio (1992: 164, footnote) describes this passage as “deliberate bathos”. Lear says that old people are useless and superfluous and he begs that the necessities of life be granted to him in condescension. Regan seems to realise this mismatch between the form and content of his speech and tells him to stop with such rhetorical devices and to return to her sister. This time she does not offer any explanation, but the verbless imperative “no more” and the straight imperative “return you” imply that this will be her final word on the matter and that she will not allow further deliberations. Lear then curses Goneril and her offspring in a row of imperatives, and, in a lengthy speech, promises that Regan shall never have his curse, upon which Regan dryly demands that he come to the point.

- (13) Lear: [...] Beloved Regan, / Thy sister’s naught. O Regan, she hath tied / Sharp-
tooth’d unkindness, like a vulture, here. [Points to his heart.]
[...]
Regan: I pray you, sir, take patience.
[...]
Lear: My curses on her! [Goneril]

Regan: O sir, you are old, / Nature in you stands on the very verge / Of his confine. You should be rul'd and led / By some discretion that discerns your state / Better than yourself. Therefore I pray you / That to our sister you do make return. / Say you have wrong'd her.

[...]

Lear: "Dear daughter, I confess that I am old; [Kneeling.] / Age is unnecessary. On my knees I beg / That you'll vouchsafe me raiment, bed, and food."

Regan: Good sir, no more; these are unsightly tricks. / Return you to my sister.

Lear: [Rising.] Never, Regan

[...]

Regan: Good sir, to th' purpose.

Regan resorts again to friendly reasoning (see 14 below). She addresses Lear as *father* and says *I pray you* in order to persuade him to return to her sister. When Goneril enters, Lear implores her "I prithee, daughter" not to make him mad.

In what follows, Lear goes through a sequence of contrasting emotions, but does not directly attack or abuse Goneril, even though he regards her as a boil, a plague-sore or a carbuncle, because he is still under the impression or rather the delusion that he can stay with Regan: "I will not trouble thee, my child; farewell. [...] I can be patient, I can stay with Regan, [...]". Regan advises him to pay attention to her sister. As in the speech by Goneril, Regan resorts to greater politeness ("I entreat you") when she tells him that he must diminish his train. The parallel also shows in the wording. Due to the heavy weight of the imposition – it restricts and finally reduces his free will to employ as many knights as he likes – the wording is elaborate and deferential but, in effect, does not leave him any choice. When both daughters tell him that he must not come with a single of his knights, Lear is stripped of all assets and possessions. Lear briefly appeals to them not to "reason need". As he feels insanity approaching, he addresses the heavens to provide him with patience.

(14) [Enter Goneril]

Regan: I pray you, father, being weak, seem so. / If till the expiration of your month / You will return and sojourn with my sister, / Dismissing half your train, come then to me.

[...]

Lear: [...] Return with her? / Persuade me rather to be slave and sumpter / To this detested groom. [Pointing at Oswald.]

Goneril: At your choice, sir.

Lear: I prithee, daughter, do not make me mad.

[...]

Regan: Give ear, sir, to my sister, / For those that mingle reason with your passion / Must be content to think you old, and so –

[...]

Regan: [...] I entreat you / To bring but five and twenty; to no more / Will I give place or notice.

Lear: I gave you all –

[...]

Regan: What need one?

Lear: O reason not the need!

[...]

Lear: But for true need – / You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need!

4.2.2 Summary

In Act II, the social and emotional conditions have changed. With Cordelia being banished, Lear's kingdom has been divided between his two elder daughters Goneril and Regan, who are now in power. Therefore, Lear is no longer in a position to issue straightforward orders (in the form of imperative clauses). His daughters politely but firmly tell him what to do. Accordingly, Lear changes his strategy, employing polite requests and then begging and pleading. For want of a direct verbal strategy, he finally uses the optative subjunctive in his appeal to heaven for supernatural assistance.

4.3 Analysis of Act III

4.3.1 Scene 2 "Storm on the Heath" (1–78)

In scene 3.2, Lear has turned mad. On the one hand, he tries to withstand the elements in heroic fashion by issuing a series of short commands, but on the other hand, he is a fragile old man, who, for the first time in the play, shows concern for the sufferings of other persons: "I have one part in my heart / That's sorry yet for thee". He addresses his fool by the friendly appellation *my boy*, *poor Fool and knave* and invites him to come into the hovel to protect himself from the storm. The imperatives "Come, your hovel" and "Come, bring us to this hovel" are not only beneficial to Lear but to them both:

(15) Lear: Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage, / blow! [...].

Fool: [...] Good nuncle, in, ask thy daughters blessing. [...].

Lear: Rumble thy bellyful! Spit, fire! Spout, rain!

[...]

Lear [to Fool]: My wits begin to turn. / Come on, my boy. How dost, my boy? Art cold? [...] Come, your hovel. / Poor Fool and knave, I have one part in my heart / That's sorry for thee.

Fool: [Sings]

[...]

Lear: True, boy. Come bring us to this hovel.

4.3.2 Act III, Scene 4 "Storm still" (1–28; 170–180)

The storm continues. Lear is now in the company of his fool, the disguised Kent, and Edgar who is disguised as the madman *Poor Tom*. Despite his humble disguise, Kent still keeps up linguistic decorum. He addresses Lear as if he were still the king (see 16 below). Lear does not recognise him and begs him to go into the hovel by saying *prithée*. As in scene 3.2, Lear now issues his imperatives for the benefit of others and not simply to have his own wants fulfilled. This is exemplified in his asking Kent to seek his own ease and that his fool go into the hovel first.

- (16) Kent [disguised as Caius]: Here is the place, my lord; good my lord / enter, / The tyranny of the open night's too rough / For nature to endure.
 Lear: Let me alone.
 Kent: Good my lord, enter here.
 Lear: Wilt break my heart?
 Kent: I had rather break mine own. Good my lord, / enter.
 Lear: Thou think'st 'tis much that this contentious storm / Invades us to the skin; [...].
 [...]
 Kent: Good my lord, enter here.
 Lear: Prithée go in thyself, seek thine own ease. / This tempest will not give me leave to ponder / On things would hurt me more. But I'll go in.
 [To the Fool]: In, boy, go first. – You houseless poverty – / Nay, get thee in; I'll pray and then I'll sleep.

"Gloucester addresses Lear and tries to lead him away from the Bedlamite. But Lear demurs and wishes to stay with Edgar, whereupon Gloucester again tries to separate them by urging Edgar back into his hovel. Lear insists on keeping with Edgar even as Kent intercedes and also tries to lead him away" (Halio 1992: 191, footnote). Lear suggests, with the use of an adhortative, that they all should go into the hovel:

- (17) [Storm still; enter Gloucester with a torch]
 Gloucester: What a night's this! / I do beseech your Grace –
 Lear: O, cry you mercy, sir. / Noble philosopher, your company.
 Edgar: Tom's a-cold.
 Gloucester: In, fellow, there, into th' hovel; keep thee warm.
 Lear: Come, let's in all.
 Kent: This way, my lord.
 Lear: With him; / I will keep still with my philosopher.
 Kent: Good my lord, soothe him; let him take the fellow.
 Gloucester: Take him you on.
 Kent: [To Edgar] Sirrah, come on; go along with us.
 Lear: [To Edgar] Come, good Athenian.

4.3.3 Summary

The belief that he had given his daughters everything he possessed and the unfulfilled expectation of filial gratitude have driven Lear mad. In addition, he has been literally stripped of all worldly possessions and, in a fit of despair, he even tries to take off his clothing during the storm. The emotional turmoil is signalled by the state of nature. Thus, on the one hand, Lear rails against the elements and demands them to create havoc, but, on the other hand, he develops, in the company of poor wretches and social outcasts, a kind of empathy for the feelings of others. The imperatives that he uses have the illocutionary force of invitations and suggestions. They show concern for the needs of others and, in addition, suggest a common course.

Brown and Gilman (1989: 185) argue that “[t]here is one other major circumstance [apart from rage] in which a speaker is unconcerned with the face needs of hearers and that is madness”. They talk about real madness and its dramatic renditions. What these have in common is that, in both, conversational maxims (see Grice 1975) are often overthrown. In reality and in Shakespeare’s tragedies, madness “is as various as the persons who are mad” (Brown and Gilman 1989: 186). However, in both cases the categorical difference between the sane and the mad “is that the sane pay more attention more of the time to both maxims of conversation and the requirements of politeness” (1989: 186).

In contrast to this, the preceding analysis of Lear’s directives has revealed something different. Despite his troubled state of mind, characterised by hysteria, delusion, and, finally, lunacy, Lear shows concern for other people’s feelings. Later on, Edgar comments in an aside on the encounter between Lear and Gloucester: “O, matter and impertinency mix’d, / Reason in madness!” (4.6.174–5).¹⁴

4.4 Analysis of Act IV

4.4.1 Scene 6 “Lear [still mad] and Gloucester” (130–180)

Lear first addresses Gloucester as an apothecary and does not recognise him (18). Gloucester complains about being blind, which outrages Lear and makes him rail, in a sequence of imperatives, against blindness and false perception, but then his tone changes remarkably; as Gloucester begins to weep he offers comfort to the blind old man. He finally recognises his faithful retainer, and advises him to be patient. The last imperatives issued towards Gloucester all have the communicative function of offers and are indications of appreciation and tenderness.

- (18) Lear [to Gloucester]: Give me an ounce of civet; good apothecary, / Sweeten my imagination. There’s money for thee.

14. Brown and Gilman also comment on “reason in madness”. They did not score some of Lear’s speeches for politeness, “because they were spoken in fury or were addressed to the elements or to no one at all” (1989: 187). They interpret Lear’s use of reverence especially in the mock trial not as “a disconfirmation of politeness theory but a world turned upside down” (1989: 187).

Gloucester: O, let me kiss that hand!

Lear: Let me wipe it first, it smells of mortality.

Gloucester: [...] Dost thou know me?

Lear: I remember thine eyes well enough. Dost / thou squiny at me? No, do thy worst, blind Cupid, I'll / not love. Read thou this challenge; mark but the penning of it.

[...]

Lear: Read.

Gloucester: What, with the case of eyes?

Lear: O ho, are you there with me? [...].

Gloucester: I see it feelingly.

Lear: What, art mad? [...]. Look with thine ears; see / /how yond justice rails upon yond simple thief. Hark / in thine ear [...].

[...]

Lear: Take that of me, my friend, who have the power / To seal th' accuser's lips. Get thee glass eyes, / And like a scurvy politician, seem / To see the things thou dost not.

[...]

Lear: If thou wilt weep my fortunes, take my eyes. / I know thee well enough; thy name is Gloucester. / Thou must be patient. [...] I will preach to thee.

Mark.

4.4.2 Act IV, Scene 7 "Lear and Cordelia" (25–83)

In this scene (see 19 below), Cordelia first speaks to Lear while he is still asleep and addresses him tenderly and pitifully as *dear father*, a term of positive politeness, but immediately changes to official decorum when he wakes up.

Lear does not immediately recognise her and begs not to be mistreated. He remains in a state of uncertainty and speaks to himself ("Let's see") when he pricks himself with a brooch or needle from his costume to test whether he is alive or merely dreaming. This state of uncertainty is underlined by the subjunctive mood, which expresses his wish to find out about his state. But, in the end, he recognises Cordelia and kneels down. He repeatedly implores Kent and Cordelia not to mock or abuse him, misinterpreting their smiles of compassion for derision. As polite request formulae he uses *pray*, *I pray* and *pray you*. His final *pray you now*, especially, followed by *forget* and *forgive* could signal the religious overtones of the verb *to pray* (in contrast to *pray* used as parenthetical functioning as a discourse marker). By contrast, Cordelia stays very formal and polite in that she asks him whether it pleases him to retire.

(19) [Enter Cordelia; enter Lear [asleep] in a chair carried by servants]

Cordelia: O my dear father, restoration hang / Thy medicine on my lips, and let this kiss / Repair those violent harms that my two sisters / Have in thy reverence made.

[Lear wakes up]

[...]

Cordelia: How does my royal lord? How fares your Majesty?

Lear: You do me wrong to take me out o' th' grave:

[...]

Lear: Where have I been? Where am I? Fair / daylight? [...] I will not swear these are my hands. Let's see, / I feel this pin prick. Would I were assur'd / Of my condition!

Cordelia: O, look upon me, sir, / And hold your hand in benediction o'er me.

[No, sir,] you must not kneel.

Lear: Pray do not mock me. / I am a very foolish fond old man, [...]. Do not laugh at me, / For (as I am a man) I think this lady / To be my child Cordelia.

Cordelia: And so I am; I am.

Lear: Be your tears wet? Yes, faith. I pray weep / not.

[...]

Lear: Am I in France?

Kent: In your own kingdom, sir.

Lear: Do not abuse me.

[...]

Cordelia: Will't please your Highness walk?

Lear: You must bear with me. / Pray you now forget, and forgive; I am old and foolish.

4.4.3 *Summary*

In the scenes discussed above, Lear goes from madness to painful recognition, and remains in a very volatile state of mind. Once he has recognised Gloucester, Lear stops railing and he shows compassion for him and offers to preach to him and teach him patience – a virtue which he himself lacked so dearly when, for instance, in cursing Goneril he did not listen to Albany's advice of "Pray, sir, be patient" (1.4.262), and when he prayed in vain for patience: "You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need" (2.4.271).

Lear finds it difficult to come to terms with matters. He expresses his wishes by means of subjunctives, and does not know exactly what to make of others and their intentions.

4.5 Analysis of Act V

4.5.1 *Scene 3 "Lear and Cordelia" (8–11; 306–12)*

In this scene, Lear and Cordelia have been taken prisoners. Upon Cordelia's question (20) Lear vehemently answers "no" and suggests instead, by means of an adhortative, a joint cause, namely that Cordelia and he should rather go to prison together and, even though caught in a "birdcage", they would be reunited.

(20) Cordelia: [...] Shall we not see these daughters and these sisters?

Lear: No, no, no, no! Come, let's away to prison: / We two alone will sing like birds I' th' cage; / When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down / And ask of thee forgiveness. So we'll live, / And pray, and sing [...].

Lear's final speech (21) and even his last words before he dies are again in the imperative mood. Now that Cordelia is dead he asks for help to undo a button. From the context it is not quite clear whether he wants the button of Cordelia's dress or his own collar button loosened. Kent obliges and Lear gives him thanks. With his final demand to look on Cordelia rather than on him he directs attention to her. In this way, these imperatives, in terms of face work and of being beneficial to those other than the speaker, stand in direct opposition to those given at the beginning of the play. Halio aptly comments on this change as follows: "In I.1, Lear, egocentric, demanded that everyone's attention be focused upon himself, as he asked his daughters publicly to declare their love. Here, finally, he directs attention not to himself, but to the Other, to Cordelia, now more precious to him than his own life" (1992: 262, footnote).

With recognition, patience, and reconciliation these plain unredressed imperatives as Lear's last words carry a different weight and have to be seen in a completely different light to similar grammatical forms from the beginning of the play.

(21) Lear: And my poor fool is hang'd! No, no, no life! / Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life, / And thou [Cordelia] no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more, / Never, never, never, never, never.

Pray you undo this button. Thank you, sir. / Do you see this? Look on her! Look her lips, / Look there, look there! [He dies.]

5. Summary and conclusion

The close investigation of Lear's directive speech acts has revealed an interesting development. At the beginning of the play, Lear issues directives and expects everybody to execute his will without exception. Non-compliance is sanctioned by punishment (see Kent and Cordelia). Brown and Gilman note that

[h]is exalted station in the first two acts appears in the different scores for politeness of speech to Lear and speech from Lear. Gloucester, Kent, Burgundy, and France all speak to the king with elaborate politeness. Even Goneril and Regan retain the forms *sir* and *my lord* when their actions have made the forms ironic (Brown and Gilman 1989: 206).

While it is true that in the first two acts others react towards Lear with polished politeness, he himself, for instance, need not be polite at all. However, when he tries to persuade Regan to let him stay with her and even begs and prays that she do so, he is outwardly polite and even subservient. This gives rise to the idea stated in the second

part of Brown and Gilman's quote above that overt politeness expressed by hollow honorific expressions and true, genuinely felt concern for other persons and its linguistic expression are two different things. Thus, for example, when Goneril and Regan tell Lear to reduce the number of his knights the wording is polite, but the contents harsh.

In Act III on the heath, Lear is reduced to almost nothing, and he has learned "to feel what wretches feel" (3.4.34). Despite his madness, his empathy shows in his directives, which reveal consideration for the sufferings of others and which have the communicative function of offers, suggestions and invitations. His volatile state of mind in Acts IV and V again shows in his directives in which he pleads and begs, and in his use of the subjunctive mood to express wishes and desires.

In terms of "true" politeness in the sense of concern for the feelings of others and not in the sense of "[p]oliteness as a set of practices, as a way of putting things when making a criticism or request, [which] has been shown to be trivial" (Brown and Gilman 1989: 207), the most honestly polite speech acts are the following, which in terms of verbal elaboration form a complete antithesis, but which reveal the greatest consideration for each other:

Cordelia: How does my royal lord? How fares your Majesty? (4.7.43)

Lear [dying]: Look there! [to Cordelia] (5.3.313)

Critics have argued (see Halio 1992: 97) about whether the interrogative or the imperative is the prevailing mood in *King Lear*. Mack (1966: 89–90) argues in favour of the imperative. He suggests that the dominant mood of *King Lear*, unlike that of *Hamlet*, is imperative.

Its mood, I would suggest (if it may be caught in a single word at all), is imperative. The play asks questions, to be sure, as *Hamlet* does, [...]. Yet it is not, I think, the play's questions that establish its distinctive coloring onstage. [...]. It is rather its commands, its invocations and appeals that have the quality of commands, its flat-footed defiances and refusals. (Mack 1966: 89f)

Berlin (1981: 92), on the other hand, disagrees, and claims instead that Lear shows a progress from imperative to interrogative, "from a sure sense of self to a confrontation with mystery".

My analysis of the play shows that there is some truth in both statements. In numerical terms, Lear as a speaker becomes less dominant during the course of the play. The number of directive speech acts also becomes smaller and more questions occur in-between, but, even at the very end, there are imperatives to be found, and Lear's final speech terminates in an imperative.

However, when Lear's directives throughout the play are compared to each other, it becomes noticeable that both their form and, even more so, their communicative function changes from commanding and ordering to inviting, offering and pleading. This would indeed signal a fundamental change in character from a self-assured

person, free of doubt to somebody who has very painfully learnt to pay consideration to other persons' feelings, and to "see better" (Kent to Lear, 1.1.158).

With respect to the entire study, the second part has shown that in order to account for the communicative functions of directive speech acts it is important to have an inventory of possible forms at hand, together with a functional description taking into account pragmatic and socio-historical aspects. However, in order to work out the illocutionary force of a specific directive, the knowledge of its situational context is important because forms that are elaborate – making use of the "glib and oily art" (1.1.224) of rhetoric – may be ironic, mock-polite or insincere, and forms such as simple straightforward imperatives may show more concern for the hearer's face than "words can wield the matter" (1.1.55).

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Two polite speech acts from a diachronic perspective

Aspects of the realisation of requesting and undertaking commitments in the nineteenth century commercial community

Gabriella Del Lungo Camiciotti

1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to shed light on the history of two speech acts: directives and commissives in a specific domain: the epistolary discourse of nineteenth century international traders. These two speech acts are closely related as they share the same direction of fit: world-to-words. The illocutionary point of directives lies in the fact that they are attempts by the speaker to get the hearer to do something, while commissives are those illocutionary acts the point of which is to commit the speaker to some course of action (Searle 1976). Both are used to try to get someone to bring about a future state of affairs. Both are at the core of business negotiations, where interlocutors are rarely in the position to ask for something without balancing the request with some form of commitment. Nevertheless, and although requests in business negotiation have been widely investigated (Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris 1996; Yeung 1997; Kong 1998 to mention just a few), commitments have, surprisingly, attracted no attention to date.

In a business context, linguistic behaviour will normally be formulated according to the nature of the situation, and the relationship between speakers and their professional roles. Speech acts will be used not just to form links with status-equal friends and acquaintances, but also to build relationships among strangers (Boxer 1993). Therefore the formulation of utterances, in addition to expressing the speaker's intention as to what should be done, is affected by interpersonal communicative goals. Moreover, since speech acts may be interpreted according to the context of social practice, it is here assumed that the historical and cultural background will determine both their performance and assessment. In short, different strategies may be employed by participants in an interaction to achieve the same communicative goals in different socio-cultural contexts. Because of this, a complete attempt to understand how past discourses work has to situate the purposive aspects of discourse-shaping and discourse-interpreting. In

other words, being able to make useful guesses about which illocutionary action a speaker/writer is performing by making an utterance requires a full understanding of the socio-historical context and, furthermore, the correct interpretation of past constructions used by speakers/writers to attain their goals should be contextualised within the contemporary conception of social and professional intercourse.

An important interactional element is politeness, both verbal and non-verbal, which is considered an index of the overall style of socially-approved interpersonal relation negotiation (Brown and Levinson 1987; Watts, Ide and Ehlich 1992; Watts 2003). Since the linguistic expression of politeness is a key dimension of commercial epistolary communication both today (Maier 1992; Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris 1997; Pilegaard 1997) and in the nineteenth century (Del Lungo Camiciotti 2006b), this paper will investigate strategies adopted to realise requests and commitments, taking into consideration the politeness dimension from an interactional perspective.

As to the methodology used to analyse the letters under scrutiny here, firstly Searle's (1975, 1979) notion of direct and indirect speech acts and Sbisà's (2001) notion of illocutionary force and degrees of strength of speech acts will be applied to the analysis of two speech acts: requests and commitments – frequently performed by nineteenth century commercial letter writers – in order to investigate which methodological approach is best suited to their study. Secondly, the forms used to negotiate business relations will be described in order to compare them with modern ones, thus shedding light on differences and similarities in usage. The general communicative purposes of business letters are, in fact, sufficiently stable over time to guarantee comparable data. Finally, a sequence will be analysed because ritualised and polite ways of negotiating meaning do not exist as predefined entities but are constructed in interaction.

To conclude, a number of research questions are addressed: firstly, do nineteenth century writers of letters show a tendency to use specific strategies in performing requests and commitments? Secondly, is their choice linked to contemporary notions of politeness? Which leads us to methodological questions: firstly, how do we describe requests and commitments? Secondly, which is the best approach to assess such phenomena: a scale of directness/indirectness or the modulation of illocutionary strength?

The working hypothesis of the case study presented here is that the preference for specific strategies in the performance of speech acts is linked to contemporary conceptions of ways of negotiating business intercourse and that differences in the realisation and/or function of speech acts are linked to changes in the socio-historical community of practice. It is hoped that the study will provide evidence for the hypothesis that the best approach to studying historical speech acts is to assess the modulation of the illocutionary strength of speech acts rather than their degree of directness/indirectness. Moreover, it is hoped that the study will help to reconstruct the context of use of these

speech acts in the specific domain of the international trader community and thus contribute to mapping the area of directives and commissives in the nineteenth century.¹

2. Data and methodology

In this paper, I examine a collection of 151 English letters published in Milan in 1873 to introduce young men to business letter-writing. The manual is addressed to a rather large audience of both the schoolboy and the practitioner, or in the author's words, the "pupil at the academy" and the "youth who has just taken his seat at the counting-house desk" (p. vii). Moreover, it is addressed to both native speakers and foreigners. The Italian edition under scrutiny here contains footnotes with Italian translations of technical and difficult words and expressions.

First published in London, this collection comprises letters of various lengths dealing with the routine activities of the international firm, collected by William Anderson with a view to filling a gap in the educational market. Commercial guides existing at that time were, according to Anderson, defective for two reasons: firstly, because they were "authored by men devoted to literary pursuits...inadequate to the task, from their ignorance of business" (p. vi) and secondly, they lacked authentic material. His guide, on the other hand, contains genuine commercial letters of the time, albeit slightly adapted for pedagogic purposes, which Anderson himself possessed or was able to get from friends. Because of this, his manual is more suitable than others "to form the youthful mind to habits of business" (p. v). Thus the superiority of Anderson's manual resides both in his being a practitioner and in the original nature of his correspondence. This second point is particularly relevant given the difficulty of obtaining business data in the nineteenth century. As Anderson explains, "Merchants are, usually, and from a very proper feeling, averse to suffering their correspondence to be made public" (p. vi). Additionally, the authenticity of the correspondence renders it very useful for research purposes as the investigation of real letters should provide more valuable insights into business communication than fictional ones composed by authors of guides.

The study of these letters in order to identify the linguistic constructions used to make requests and undertake commitments, has been conducted both quantitatively and qualitatively. The frequency of such speech acts has been assessed in order to evaluate their relevance in a business context. The close reading of the letters has, in fact, revealed that, among the many speech acts performed by writers, directives and

1. Speech acts can be conceived as a dynamic system in that they change over time in both their formal realisation and the functions they fulfil in a given culture or domain. In this, I am following Jucker and Taavitsainen (2000), who have proposed that speech acts occupy a multi-dimensional pragmatic space whose coordinates are context-, culture- and time-specific. From this perspective, it is easier to explain the complexity and fuzziness of speech acts.

commissives are particularly relevant to business communication. Because of this, the paper focuses on how these illocutions are realised: either directly/indirectly or in a modalised/straightforward way. The interactional perspective assumed here implies a consideration of the politeness dimension taken in its broad meaning of socially appropriate behaviour adopted by participants in interaction in order to achieve their goals (for a full discussion of the term politeness see Watts 2003). The examination of a full sequence of letters which focus on a misunderstanding will allow us to illustrate, in more detail, conventionalised ways to politely interact in the nineteenth century business community and thus show how politeness was conceived in this context.

Since, instead of using present day material, I study speech acts in nineteenth century written material, the choice of data poses a series of questions, both generic and methodological. As to the first, we may say that commercial letters represent a genre well suited to investigating the relational network of members of the trader community and the rhetorical practices used in order to achieve the goals of commercial communication in the nineteenth century (Del Lungo Camiciotti 2006a). It is, in fact, the case that, before computer mediated communication, letters were the most important way of fostering business relations over distance. In this sense they are particularly helpful for exploring how traders linguistically realised the basic speech acts characterising their intercourse and the findings of the study should permit some generalisations on ways of interacting in a business community to be made.

The second series of questions is concerned with the method used to investigate past interactional strategies. In recent years, methodology has been a central theme in historical pragmatics, and therefore I will attempt to show how historical written material can be explained on the basis of contemporary views based on spoken data such as speech act theory. In the absence of historical oral data, a number of scholars have noted that correspondence shows striking similarities with conversation in that both are highly interactional genres (Biber 1988: 58) and reflect the social and functional relations to a very high degree – only spoken texts can equal their range according to Görlach (1999: 149). More explicitly, Fitzmaurice (2002) considers the letter a speech act and the practice of letter writing as conversation in that meaning is co-constructed in the exchange by writer and reader. The approach adopted here is that, given the similarities between correspondence and conversation, it should be possible to reconstruct meaningful use of language in the nineteenth century business world by investigating epistolary discourse. Despite the many differences between spoken and written language use, all communicative events in a certain domain will, in fact, show basic constants in interactional style.

I will assume here that the business community, both in the nineteenth century and today, has very focused purposes: to establish and foster commercial relationships,

and to interact persuasively so as to effectively achieve commercial goals.² The typical speech acts which serve these functions are today, as in the nineteenth century, requests and commitments exchanged between potential sellers and prospective customers. Since the functions of these speech acts are quite stable over time, the paper focuses on their forms in nineteenth century commercial letters in order to explore the variation in their realisation linked to changes in the conception of social intercourse in the business world, and to identify the site of variation.³ As it seems that the goals of participants in interaction were best achieved in the nineteenth century by using politeness strategies⁴, this leads us to the closely related question of how to assess polite ways of realising requests and commitments used in the past.

People perform speech acts in both spoken and written interaction. Sometimes people announce their illocutionary intentions using phrases which contain performative verbs. But explicit performatives are common only in situations where it is important that a person's intentions in saying something be absolutely unambiguous such as, for instance, in some legal text types.⁵ In other situations they are less common and people indicate their illocutionary intentions less explicitly. In particular, being indirect about illocutionary intentions seems to be considered more polite than being direct, at least in English. For instance, Searle writes that "the chief motivation for using these indirect forms is politeness" (1975: 74); Leech expresses a similar position as he claims that politeness and the related notion of tact are crucial in explaining "why people are often so indirect in conveying what they mean" (1983: 80). Also Brown and Levinson's hierarchy (1987: 17–21) assumes that the more indirect an utterance, the more polite it becomes.

The question of politeness appears thus to be linked to how direct/indirect one is in requesting someone to do something or committing oneself to a course of action in a specific context. In fact, although the argument that politeness and indirectness represent parallel dimensions is rejected, Blum-Kulka (1987) and Blum-Kulka et al. (1989)

2. On modern business letters see Jenkins and Hinds (1987); Pilegaard (1997); Gillaerts and Gotti (2005); Vergaro (2005). For recent interest in a diachronic perspective on business letters see Del Lungo Camiciotti (2005, 2006a, b) and Dossena (2006a, b).

3. The study of cross-cultural pragmatics has shown that diatopic differences in ways of speaking and in culture-specific language usage have been largely underestimated by scholars following the ethnocentrically biased work by Searle, Grice, Brown and Levinson and others (Wierzbicka 1991). Moreover, if we take into consideration social and professional norms of interaction in connection with specific cultural attitudes, it is clear that it is not just politeness that is at issue, but the very speech acts which realise the values of a community.

4. For a brief exposition of the nineteenth century commercial style of politely interacting see Del Lungo Camiciotti (2006b).

5. Although many speech acts, perhaps most, are not realised with an explicit speech act verb (Taavitsainen and Jucker 2007: 110), the performative use of speech act verbs seems to be particularly relevant in institutional contexts of use. On explicit performative clauses in legal texts see Williams (2005: 54–55).

have established a scale of directness to assess polite strategies in requests and claim that the strategies rated as the most polite are conventional indirect requests. Yet the link between politeness and indirectness seems to be perceived differently across cultures (Watts 2003: 14–17) in spite of the fact that all human cultures have forms of social behaviour for displaying consideration for others. Indeed, the universality of politeness phenomena posited by Brown and Levinson (1987) and Leech (1983) has been variously criticised and the relativity of any speech activity proposed.⁶ Similar levels of directness, in fact, do not necessarily carry the same social meaning in different communities as these may favour different interactional styles. For instance, the English preference for indirectness in conversation expressing politeness as social distance and formality contradicts the Greek tendency to the display of warmth and friendliness by using unmitigated direct speech acts (Sifianou 1992). In addition, the level of indirectness may depend on the specific context of use as the negotiation of meaning may be influenced by psychological and affective factors (Thomas 1995: 106).

But what do we mean by linguistic politeness? Of course, this is a much-debated question, with which I will deal very briefly here for lack of space.⁷ While deference is reserved for expressions of respect for people of a higher status, politeness has become a cover term for both norms of behaviour and linguistic choices made in relation to the need to preserve one's face in general, that is, one's public self image. A distinction is made between a negative face, a person's need for freedom of action, and a positive face, a person's need to be treated as an equal or insider. Politeness strategies are supposed to involve indirectness and/or mitigation to save the addressee's face (Brown and Levinson 1987; Leech 1983). However, the concepts of politeness and facework as ritualised social activity are culture-bound and may vary both diatopically and diachronically. Additionally, impoliteness and rudeness may be as functional in communication as politeness in certain contexts and situations (Culpeper 1996).

Since politeness is often equated with indirectness, particularly in formulating requests, let's see what we mean by indirect speech acts. The basic structure and general patterns of speech act performance have been looked at by a number of scholars. However, the seminal studies by Searle, though ethnocentrically biased, are still widely considered to be the starting-point for any discussion on this topic. The problem posed by indirect speech acts is, in Searle's view, the problem of how it is possible for the speaker to say one thing and mean it and, at the same time, mean something else (Searle 1979: 31). The answer he gives is that in indirect speech acts the speaker communicates to the hearer more than he actually says by way of relying on their mutually shared background information, both linguistic and non-linguistic, together with the general powers of rationality and inference on the part of the hearer (Searle 1979: 31–32). It is then conventionality of form which ensures the addressee understands the speaker's implicit

6. See Watts (2003) for an overview of recent positions on this issue.

7. A full discussion is contained in Watts (2003), who actually prefers an approach focusing on impoliteness phenomena.

meaning. This is certainly true of many ways of politely formulating requests and assertions, but there are also other strategies to express polite requests and commitments if we assume that the generation of meaning is always dynamic and interactive. There are not many fixed form-function relationships in language use from a pragmatic perspective as the realisation of a specific speech act is linked to both cultural values and conversational goals. For instance, the widespread use of indirectness in requests in Anglo-Saxon society seems linked to the fact that this society values distance in interpersonal relations (Wierzbicka 1991: 63). Furthermore, people may use indirectness not only for politeness reasons, but also because they enjoy having fun with language or to increase the effectiveness of the message (Thomas 1995: 143–144).

An equally relevant notion is that of mitigation, defined as the result of the weakening of one of the interactional parameters, and a downgrading when the parameters involved are scalar (Caffi 1999: 882) that is helpful in understanding how interactional devices anchored in linguistic form can influence the relational emotive effect of speech acts (1999: 884). According to Caffi, mitigating devices are much more numerous than reinforcing devices, particularly with reference to requests in English, as they have the basic effect of reducing obligations (1999: 882). Mitigated choices, being perceived as polite by participants, can certainly contribute to the emotive monitoring of interaction. Interactional efficiency, however, can also be based on the opposite direction of modulation, i.e. reinforcement, when other speech acts are performed to negotiate a polite interaction, for instance commitments. Within this account, modulation can be defined as a paralinguistic feature, “the superimposing upon the utterance of a particular attitudinal colouring, indicative of the speaker’s involvement in what he is saying and his desire to impress or convince the hearer” (Lyons 1977: 65). Paralinguistic signals, which are an essential part of all normal language behaviour, further determine the meaning of utterances and serve to regulate the development of a conversation and the interpersonal relations of the participants (Lyons 1977: 64).

Sbisà (2001) broadens the perspective by dealing with mitigation/reinforcement phenomena in terms of degrees of strength of the illocutionary force of speech acts which bring about changes in the interpersonal relationship between interlocutors. Mitigation and reinforcement appear not as stylistic phenomena superficially adjoined to independently performed speech acts, but as closely connected, or even identical, to the adjustment and tuning of the effects that speech acts bring about (2001: 1792). Modulated speech acts determine changes not just in the attitudes of participants, but also in the social situation. It is, in fact, the case that context can be negotiated, constructed and changed, in so far as goals may be negotiated or shifted and conventional states-of-affairs, such as attribution of rights, obligations, entitlements and commitments, depend on the agreement of the social participants (Sbisà 2002).

Speech acts are thus both the expression of individual intentions and conventional social actions. In some circumstances, particularly in business contexts, speech acts not only do certain things but also express strategies of rapport and involvement where

the participants' attitudes, expectations and responses interfere with the successfulness of the speech acts within the limits imposed by the social roles played by participants.

In recent years, requests have been central to much research in linguistic politeness from a cross-cultural perspective. Blum-Kulka (1987: 131) defines politeness as the interactional balance achieved between two needs: the need for pragmatic clarity and the need to avoid coerciveness. The notion of indirectness and face are intertwined: tipping the balance in favour of either pragmatic clarity or non-coerciveness will decrease politeness. From this viewpoint, politeness in requesting may be assessed along a scale of directness/indirectness in which degrees of directness are correlated with situations and cultures. Strategy types of requesting are accordingly identified on the basis of directness (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989).

To sum up, it seems that direct requests in conversational English have a high chance of being perceived as imposing and impolite acts. In the business domain, however, the situation appears slightly different. Given the manipulative character of trade dealings in general, the assumption is that commercial letters are inherently persuasive as they try to get the addressee to comply in some way (Vergaro 2005: 110). To do this, correspondents mostly favour positive politeness strategies in the opening and closing sections with the aim of building a friendly, cooperative business atmosphere (Pilegaard 1997: 228). In the propositional section of the letter, where requests tend to be expressed explicitly, the negative politeness strategies employed by participants in communication are not very elaborate. In fact, the Gricean maxims of clarity and brevity are strongly abided by in business letters, which tend to get to the point very quickly (Pilegaard 1997: 241).⁸ Even though this may be true in western societies today when a quite egalitarian society allows conflict to surface to some extent and thus bring facework to the forefront⁹, this is not corroborated by my data. Indeed, it seems that in the context of a hierarchical society such as Victorian Britain interpersonal relations were handled on quite a different basis, also in written interaction.¹⁰ A different approach is then needed to study historical business data.

Illocutionary acts are complex entities capable of carrying a multiplicity of speaker meanings and intentions and open to various possible interpretations. Yet, we may say that there is a command at the core of any request while there is an offer at the core of

8. These observations refer generally to English business discourse. Yet, striking differences have been observed (Maier 1992) in the use of politeness strategies between native and non-native speakers.

9. Yet the notion of face can be culturally determined. For instance Gu (1990) suggests that requests, offers and criticisms are not as imposing and face threatening in Chinese as they are in British society. Also, the three factors of imposition, social distance, and relative power postulated in Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness seem to affect requests in English and Chinese business correspondence quite differently (Yeung 1997).

10. On Victorian trade ethos and interactional style see Del Lungo Camiciotti (2006a: 156-158).

any commitment. Since this core remains stable over time, it is in the periphery of the speech act that variation is realised by modulating its illocutionary force. As different conceptions of acceptable interaction may shape the linguistic expression of requesting and committing oneself to a course of action, the historical specificity of the speech act is brought about by affecting the fuzzy boundary of the speech act core. Within this framework, strategies of mitigation and reinforcement are essential for the understanding and identification of a speech act and thus a theory of modulation seems better suited to investigating historical variation in speech acts than a scale of directness. The complexity and indeterminacy of speech acts such as requests in historical data has been highlighted by Archer and Culpeper (this volume), who also seem dissatisfied with a classification of requests on the basis of the scale of directness/indirectness elaborated by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), who also claim that upgraders and downgraders are not essential for utterances to be recognized as requests (1989: 18, 60).

3. Analysis and discussion of findings: Form and function of requesting and undertaking commitments

While modern English speakers rarely commit themselves to straightforward claims, writers of commercial letters seem to prefer varying degrees of explicitness in requesting and committing themselves to a future action. If we examine the realisation of requests in nineteenth century letters, we note that *please* is the most common device used to mitigate an obligation imposed on the addressee in both constructions such as *You will please + verb* (example 1) and, less frequently, in imperatives such as *Be pleased + verb* (example 2). Another common expression is *Be so good as + verb* (example 3) or *You will be so good as + verb* (example 4). These are the most frequent conventional constructions used to make an explicit request. The performative verb *request* is occasionally used but its illocutionary force is reduced by the formulaicity of the expression (examples 3, 5). Indirect strategies such as the use of questions are rarely encountered (example 6), but the illocutionary force of requests may be variously mitigated in expressions such as example (7), where the request of an account is presented as a favour done to the writer, or example (8), where the writer presents the solicitation to order as an act done in the customer's best interest. In giving instructions as to the operations to be carried out by the addressee a mix of strategies may be employed (example 9) including the downgrading of the overt attribution of obligation through the use of circumlocution (example 10).

- (1) Enclosed, you will receive first of exchange for 250 L at sixty days' sight, on George Bury and Co., with which *you will please to do the needful*, and credit my account accordingly. (Letter 122)
- (2) Any sum of money that this gentleman may require, to the extent of fifteenth hundred pounds sterling, *be pleased to advance* on my account, either against

his receipt, or his draft on me to your order, as may be most agreeable to yourselves. (Letter 47)

- (3) The present is to *request that you will purchase*, and ship for my account, by the first regular free trader for this port, ten thousand hare skins well packed and in good sound condition, to be marked 1M, 1 to 20. *Be so good as to effect insurance thereon*, so as to cover expenses in case of loss, and *take* your reimbursement by draft on me at sixty days' draft. (Letter 68)
- (4) Should you have an opportunity, you may draw on me for the cost of the coal, etc., together with that of insurance, which *you will be so good as to effect* on the outward cargo, to its full value, with an addition of five per cent. (Letter 110)
- (5) *We request* you to note our respective signatures as given at foot... (Letter 21)
- (6) Would not this price tempt you to take them? (Letter 224)
- (7) *I shall be glad to be furnished* with your account made out in the same manner. (Letter 150)
- (8) It is highly probable that prices may still rise therefore *we would advice you to give* in your orders without delay. (Letter 224)
- (9) This shipment *must be made* in a strictly neutral vessel, giving the preference to the English flag. The invoice and bill of lading of this sugar *should be made out* to our address, and forwarded to Joseph Vancouver, Esq. of London who will, you may rest assured, on receipt thereof, honor your drafts for our moiety of the invoice amount. *Be pleased* to hand him by two of three opportunities, the requisite advice, to enable him to effect insurance in due time. (Letter 230)
- (10) *I must trouble you to produce* a certificate of her actual existence from the mayor or the clergyman of the town or parish in which she resides, and her power of attorney authorising you to receive her pensions. (Letter 227)

In undertaking commitments, the use of performative verbs is even more rare than with directives. The writer only once uses the verb *undertake* (example 11) and twice *intend*. The most frequent strategy is *I/We shall* and less often *I/We will*, which may be realised either straightforwardly or through modulated expressions. The choice of the auxiliary verb *shall* is unmarked for intention since the speaker only refers to a future course of action (example 16). It is, however, the case that expressions containing *shall* are nearly always reinforced through the use of positive adjectives (examples 12, 14) or circumlocution (example 15) or other devices (example 13). In constructions containing *will*, the speaker explicitly expresses his intention to perform a future action. Again, the writer nearly always prefers to reinforce the illocutionary point of the act by using various strategies: from positive adjectives such as *glad*, *happy*, *ready* (example 12, 19),

also used in combination with *shall* or adverbials such as *with pleasure* (example 17), to more complex circumlocution (examples 16, 18).¹¹

- (11) *I undertake to guarantee* the due executions of any orders with which you may be pleased to favor him, as he will be furnished with full power to act in my name, and on my behalf. (Letter 25)
- (12) *I shall be ready to pay* Mrs Charles Kempthorne's pension, on your furnishing me with authority to receive it. (Letter 227)
- (13) On receiving his or your answer, *I shall of course honour* the draft. (Letter 103)
- (14) *I shall likewise be disposed to ship* some on my own account, or on joint account with you, if you should have no objection. (Letter 110)
- (15) We feel extremely obliged to you, and also to Mr. De Silva, for the consignments of sugar and tapioca, by the Hoffnung, from Lisbon and *you may be well assured we shall exert ourselves to the utmost*, to prove ourselves deserving of your recommendation. (Letter 129)
- (16) *I shall appropriate* this amount, in paying Mr.-'s demand against the goods of yours yet in his possession. *I mean* to take them on Monday next, though I am sorry to say, I know not what to do with them. Had I not pledged myself to receive them, I would not do so, as it is, *I will do the best I can* for your interest. (Letter 237)
- (17) Should you wish me to effect the insurance, *I will do it with much pleasure* and without charging commission. (Letter 257)
- (18) We shall be proud to be favoured with your orders, in the execution of which *we will neglect nothing* that can contribute towards giving you entire satisfaction. (Letter 29)
- (19) Fully persuaded that you will show Mr. Fortescue every kindness and attention, and will endeavour to make his residence at Hamburg as agreeable as possible, I beg to assure you that *I shall consider myself greatly obliged, and shall be most happy* to have an opportunity of serving you in return. (Letter 42)

I will now present the analysis of a sequence of seven letters dealing with a misunderstanding as to the payment of a draft. In the first two letters (102, 103) information is contained as to a bill of exchange drawn by a Mr. Sommers, endorsed by De la Rue and presented to a James Box. The latter is writing to both Mr. Sommers to solicit information (letter 102) and to De la Rue (letter 103) to express his surprise at the bill. He complains about Mr. Sommers' neglect, that he has not informed him in spite of the fact that he wrote to him on the very day on which the bill is dated. He then asks for further details about the transaction before accepting it, but commits himself to pay as

11. A full discussion of the rhetorical strategies employed in this and two other business letter collections of the same period is contained in Del Lungo Camiciotti (2005).

soon as he receives an explanation. The offer to honour the draft is made explicitly, though on condition of receiving a clarification; his commitment to pay is reinforced by the reader-oriented discourse marker *of course*, which only slightly modifies the illocutionary force of the speech act and indicates concern for the addressee by, at least partly, redressing the previous complaint.

- (20) Since the receipt of your letter of the 15th August, respecting the credit for 700l on favour of Mr. J. G. Sommers, nothing has occurred to occasion my troubling you; but this morning, to my surprise, a bill of exchange for 700l has been presented, purporting to be drawn by Mr. Sommers, at three months' date, from the 2nd September, and in favor of Messrs. De la Rue and Co., but indorsed "De la Rue and Co." apparently in your hand writing. Mr. Sommers having written to me on the very day on which this bill is dated, and subsequently from Havre, under date of the 25th ult. without mentioning his having drawn such a bill (though of course I would expect he would do so) I have thought it prudent to with hold my acceptance until I hear from you, whether you have negotiated this bill or not, for in these times when forgeries are so frequent, and fraudulent practices of such common occurrence, the utmost caution is required in transactions of this nature. If Mr. Sommers drew this bill it is an unpardonable oversight, or inexcusable neglect on his part, that he did not give me the necessary advice, in the letters alluded to. I believe he is still in Havre, and I wrote to him on the 2nd inst. respecting this transaction. *On receiving his or your answer, I shall of course honour the draft.* (Letter 103)

Two days later he writes another letter (104) to De la Rue to inform them that he has accepted the bill "for your honour as endorsers in the persuasion that the endorsement is in your handwriting" because the holders of the draft did not consent to wait any longer. He then asks them again to give him the required information as to the draft. The request is made using a very conventional pattern which only slightly mitigates the force of the speech act. If everything is right, he will act accordingly. The phrasing of both the request for information and the commitment to the subsequent course of action is expressed by means of strategies that are straightforward and conventionally formal. The conventionality of these constructions is far from being meaningless; indeed, it reveals typical ways of interacting. Together with the choice of discursive strategies and address formulae it is one of the ways in which politeness is manifested in writing.

- (21) *I hope, in a day of two, to hear from you that all is right respecting this draft, when not only I shall be relieved from the uneasiness which Mr. Sommers' neglect has occasioned me, but you from all responsibility; as I shall in that case, place the draft to the account of that gentleman.* (Letter 104)

The next letter (105), which precedes the one addressed to De la Rue, is written by James Box to Mr. Sommers to explicitly tell him that a bill has been presented for acceptance, which appears to have been drawn by him to the order of De la Rue. The

request to make his position clear is presented in a very forthright way only softened by the command to act immediately being formulated as hope. This is followed by complaints which explicitly criticise the behaviour of Mr. Sommers, though this criticism is hedged by counterbalancing devices: the request that he is more cautious is formulated as a bald-on-record imperative; however, the act of commanding is embedded in a context which consists of a preceding exclamation conveying emotional empathy and a following reassurance which again mitigates the force of the imperative by signalling cordiality and good interpersonal relations. On the whole, we can say that the command to act is explicit, though embedded in conventionally polite expressions which reduce the illocutionary strength of the speech act.

- (22) Having no advice from you, although you wrote to me on the same day I have been (however reluctantly) obliged to dishonour it. *I hope you will, immediately on receipt of this (should you not have done it before in answer to my last), do the needful, and put me out of suspense.* This neglect on your part (as I have no doubt it will prove to be) has exposed me to very serious consequences with Messrs. De la Rue & Co., who will perhaps attribute my refusal of your draft to some sinister motive. For Heavens's sake! *be more regular and cautious in future.* I always considered you a man of business; but these inattentions will shake my confidence in you, which has hitherto been unlimited. (Letter 105)

In the next letter (106) De la Rue & Co inform James Box that the bill has been signed by Mr. Sommers in their office and so is certainly his. This should reassure James Box in spite of Mr. Sommers' neglect to inform him. To this James Box replies (letter 107) that he is perfectly satisfied with the explanation and regrets the trouble they have had in this transaction. The series of letters is concluded by a letter by Mr. Sommers to James Box explaining the reason why he did not think it necessary to inform him.

To sum up, although James Box seems rather cross and very anxious about the transaction, he negotiates the situation by politely modulating his requests and emphasising commitments: the core of each speech act is quite explicit but it is usually either softened or strengthened. The illocutionary force of the speech acts is in fact regulated by the need to persuade his interlocutors without revealing his manipulative intentions. This is perfectly understood by his interlocutors who reply accordingly. To conclude, politeness in requests and commitments is not expressed indirectly, but by modulating the speech act according to standardised norms. The conventionality of most constructions used by writers of letters, far from being meaningless, underlines the active role played by the addressee of the message not just in understanding the force of the speech act but also the mitigation/reinforcement devices in terms of "degrees of strength" of the illocutionary force (Sbisà 2001).

The situation is one which could easily happen today as the solicitation of payment is a common speech activity in the commercial world. Yet it would be handled quite differently. Although requests and commitments are created on the same principles, in fact strategies and verbal realisations may vary because customers regulate

conventional ways of interacting and fostering commercial relations. In the correspondence under scrutiny here, ritualised courtesy, which is also manifested in opening and closing formulae, far from being inexpressive because conventional, reveals that a sort of formal cordiality, sometimes bordering on familiarity, was perceived as the appropriate way of interacting in the nineteenth-century business community. These values may explain the use of modulated straightforward speech acts, while today less explicit formulations based on considerations of status and power would be preferred (Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris 1996; Yeung 1997).

The analysis allows us to present some results. Firstly, performative verbs are as recurrent as might be expected in that the business context is not institutional and wishes and intentions have to be negotiated between participants. Secondly, indirect strategies in the Searlian sense are rarely used in the act of requesting. We never encounter utterances with two illocutionary meanings such as the prototypical *It is cold in this room* asserting something about the room temperature and at the same time requesting that the window be closed. Even the typical indirect strategy of asking something by using a question is rarely found, in spite of the fact that it is considered the most common English way of indirectly expressing politeness in requests in accordance with values of formality and distance (Wierzbicka 1991). Imperatives, today commonly considered impolite, are frequently used, though modalised.

Thirdly, the preferred strategy to perform requests and commitments politely seems to be modulation: downgrading for directives and upgrading for commissives. Participants express their intentions quite explicitly, but they nearly always use modulating devices which range from adverbials to complex sentences. Constructions are commonly mitigated when used to request that the addressee do something and strengthened when the writer commits himself to do something. This last result corroborates Sbisà's hypothesis that the illocutionary force of a speech act is a matter of degree.

It should finally be noted that the analysis of speech acts cannot be conducted at sentence level because the core command and offer are embedded in the argumentative and persuasive context. Words in the sentence turn out to be less important than the larger discourse and the context of the utterance in determining illocutionary force. Moreover, the analysis of the exchange of letters supports the hypothesis that the fine-tuning of requests and commitments is related to the interpersonal relationship the commercial partners establish in the context of contemporary business values and to the beliefs as to what constitutes the best way of interacting to successfully achieve one's goals.

4. Concluding observations

The results of the case study enable us to make some observations in relation to the research and methodological questions posed in the introduction.

In the correspondence under scrutiny in this paper, requests and commitments consist of an explicit core whose illocutionary force is modulated through strategies linked to contemporary conceptions of polite business intercourse. The modulation approach proposed by Caffi and Sbisà seems then more helpful in describing speech acts than a scale of directness/indirectness because it better accounts for the fuzziness of speech acts in their historical variation. Moreover, indirectness is a notion shaped by cultural values reflecting specific interactional styles which vary across time. For instance, indirectness, usually linked to formality, is an attitude which is often invoked in relation to distance in modern Anglo-Saxon culture. Yet, in the nineteenth century, this does not seem to hold as formality does not exclude an overt show of respect and cordiality sometimes bordering on friendliness.

Nineteenth-century traders modulated their requests and commitments following contemporary notions of polite social intercourse in business relations, which valued agreement more than conflict avoidance and face saving. In short, gentlemanly behaviour was the driving force in doing business (Del Lungo Camiciotti 2006b: 160) and this did not necessarily imply being indirect. In the business community, the function of requests and commitments remains quite stable over time as the negotiation of interpersonal relations is related to matters such as the adjustment of the relationship between the interlocutors, the achievement of goals and the avoidance of undesirable consequences. These factors affect the function of such speech acts today, as they did in the nineteenth century, because the necessity to achieve one's goals is always mitigated by the desire to establish good relations with business interlocutors, but strategies vary as the same aims may be best pursued differently in a changed socio-cultural context.

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“No botmeles bihestes”

Various ways of making binding promises in Middle English

Mari Pakkala-Weckström

Trouthe is the hyeste thyng that man may kepe (The *Canterbury Tales*, Franklin's Tale V (F) 1479)¹

1. Introduction

This article will explore the speech act of promising in the Middle English period, focusing on the different ways of promising in their varying contexts in literature, with the main emphasis on Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and *Troilus and Criseyde*, along with both contemporary and later analogues. I will start with a discussion of Searle's speech act theory from the perspective of historical linguistic analysis, and then examine the peculiar nature of promises in the theory, in particular the special conditions that a speech act needs to fulfil in order to qualify as a promise. I will then explore the concept of a “binding promise” in the medieval literary context. I will look at different ways of performing the speech act of a binding promise; i.e. what kind of performatives are used, and whether the choice of words is essential in making a promise binding. Also important are references to promises, i.e. how the speech act is referred to by the promisers, promisee, or a third party. I will argue that there are serious problems in applying Searle's conditions, particularly the essential condition, to Middle English promises; simply not having the intention of undertaking the obligation does not excuse the promiser, if certain words have been uttered to the promisee. And, to complicate matters further, sometimes having the intention without actually uttering any specific words to the addressee seems to be enough to create an obligation.

By a binding promise I am referring to an oral commitment given by way of a speech act which usually takes a certain formula. Such an utterance is jointly understood by the speaker and hearer(s) resulting in the speaker having irreversibly committed him/herself to whatever has accompanied the formulaic utterance; e.g. by

1. All Chaucer citations (in Middle English) are from the *Riverside Chaucer*.

saying: “I hereby promise to eat my hat” the speaker makes the commitment to eat his/her hat by uttering the words *I hereby promise*. Thus the utterance of these specific words has created an obligation for the speaker (promiser) to eat a hat.

This paper is based on two hypotheses on the concept of the binding promise: first, that this specific speech act was extremely important in the medieval period, and in chivalric literature in particular. This I will set out to prove by examining various examples of promises, many of which are in some way defective, and yet usually honoured by the promisers. The second hypothesis is that the importance of binding promises started to decrease after the medieval era. This can be seen in some examples from later literature, but, curiously enough, also in the modern translations of medieval material.

2. Method and material

The data used for this study is extracted from various sources. I have previously studied the promise made by Dorigen to Aurelius in Chaucer’s *Franklin’s Tale* (Pakkala-Weckström 2002); however, this promise is only one in the interesting chain of promises in the tale. Thus, the natural place to start looking for more material was elsewhere in the tale, as well as in the rest of the *Canterbury Tales*. Binding promises with sufficient context were found in the *Wife of Bath’s Tale* and the *Friar’s Tale*. I also searched Chaucer’s other works, of which *Troilus and Criseyde* yielded several examples of interesting promises. These were tracked down by the use of Oizumi’s *Concordance*; in addition, I also made headword searches in *The Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse* (<http://www.hti.umich.edu>). Also helpful in finding parallel material for the *Wife of Bath’s Tale* has been *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales* (Correale and Hamel 2005).

For points of comparison, I have also turned to later works, which contain themes similar to the medieval works studied: I have looked at the “pact with the devil”-sequence in Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* alongside Chaucer’s *Friar’s Tale*, as well as the lovers’ promises in Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida* in contrast to Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*.

The material used in this study is mainly drawn from fiction because literature offers countless variations of promises – of making them, keeping them, and breaking them. I have focused on promises found in literary dialogue. These promises can represent what Taavitsainen and Jucker call the “performative use” of speech act verbs, i.e. “direct evidence of the speech acts in their prototypical form” (2007: 112–113): this is when the promise actually creates the obligation. In the dialogue, the characters also refer to promises that they have made; these references, as well as some references in the narrative surrounding the dialogue, have also been included in the study; they represent the category of the “descriptive use” of speech acts, which comprises all speech acts that are not performative (Taavitsainen and Jucker 2007: 112–113).

But what kind of a picture of the actual speech act of promising can we expect to obtain from literary material? It can be argued, for example, that medieval chivalric literature represents the period's ideals rather than its realities. Perhaps binding promises – especially those that are made with the devil or with a fairy – are a literary phenomenon, but does that mean that they would not be of scholarly interest? First of all, obviously literature does not tell us how people in the Middle Ages actually gave their word to one another, rather how different authors have chosen to represent them in giving their word (see Jucker 2000: 370). Secondly, as Jucker quite importantly argues, the spoken language in fiction is “of sufficient interest... to warrant pragmatic analyses” (2004: 201).²

Due to the fact that I have only focused on occurrences of certain words/utterances and collocations in specific contexts (see below for a detailed list), the search has been largely manual, and any results therefore are qualitative and suggestive rather than comprehensive. Headword searches in electronic databases have yielded several examples, but establishing whether these actually represent genuine binding promises requires a thorough knowledge of the context; therefore, I have used the results only as additional, supportive material. However, I have been able to find a variety of different ways of making, keeping and breaking binding promises in the Middle English period. The comparison with early modern English sources also seems to suggest a change in the culture of promising in the history of English.

3. Speech acts and their linguistic realisations in history

In his 1965 article “What is a speech act”, John R. Searle defines illocutionary acts thus: “the production of the sentence token under certain conditions is the illocutionary act, and the illocutionary act is the minimal unit of communication” ([1965]1991: 254). The phrase “under certain conditions” is more or less the cornerstone of Searle's philosophical approach to language and communication. However, I would argue that we should also pay attention to the concept of “the sentence token”, since Searle's speech act theory relies heavily on specific linguistic realisations of intentions; he argues that “there is a possible sentence (or sentences) the utterance of which in a certain context would in virtue of its (or their) meaning constitute a performance of that speech act” (1969: 16). Thus, specific linguistic forms can be associated with specific speech acts (and vice versa), and potentially, with their perlocutionary effects. This interdependence between form and function poses a significant challenge to the diachronic study of speech acts.

Important issues to be raised in any diachronic study of speech acts are, amongst others, the form and context of the speech acts, grammatical considerations and the historical context. Obviously, language will change over the course of time; new ways

2. See also Pakkala-Weckström (2005: 44-45).

of “doing things with words” will arise while old ones will fade away or change their meaning; as Taavitsainen and Fitzmaurice importantly point out in their discussion of the nature of historical pragmatics: “meanings are not fixed but different audiences make different meanings” (2007: 26).

Since Searle’s connection between the actual linguistic element and the speech act is rather simplistic, this part of the theory needs some rethinking – most importantly, the question needs to be asked as to whether a new sentence token can carry the exact same meaning as an earlier one, or do meanings change over time as well. Bertucelli Papi argues that “referential, attributive and relational properties making up propositional meanings are by themselves linked to a system of linguistic semantics which is subject to diachronic variation” (2000: 59). However, IFIDs also inevitably develop, vary and change – so the question is: if both the propositional content and the illocutionary force of a speech act are subject to change, what happens to the speech act?³

In the Searlian framework, promises made by uttering the words “I promise” are considered powerful; Searle and Vanderveken observe that “promises involve a rather special kind of commitment, namely an obligation. This undertaking of an obligation increases the degree of strength of the commitment” (1985: 192). One of my aims in this paper is to show that the strength of commitment may not, in fact, be completely dependent on the actual words used in the utterance of the speech act, but that there have been many ways of undertaking obligations in the history of the English language.

This is where we need a *tertium comparationis*, i.e. a common platform of reference (see Krzeszowski 1990; also Jucker 2004). In the study of the binding promise, this common platform has to be, in addition to the illocutionary force, the perlocutionary effect of the speech act, by which I mean the impact on the promisee, the promiser, a third party, or a combination of these. The perlocutionary effect of the promise is the force which makes it binding. This effect can be reached by various means, as shall be shown below; together these different forms of making a binding promise form a pragmatic space which is the *tertium comparationis* (cf. Jucker 2004: 203).

In this study, I have concentrated on ways of promising before the emergence of the verb *to promise* in ca. 1400 (*OED* online entry for *promise* at <http://dictionary.oed.com/>); particularly prior to this, commitments were undertaken in many different ways, e.g. by the use of verbs *bihighthen*, *plighthen*, *sweren*⁴ and *wedden*. Interestingly, other linguistic resources such as the noun *trouthe* with an appropriate verb (see below) were also often used to make and elicit promises.⁵

3. See also Kohnen (2000: 301) and Taavitsainen and Jucker (2007: 108).

4. “Swearing” often involves invoking a sacred object or revered institution (Searle and Vanderveken 1985: 194); however, it differs from promising (in the same way as “pledging” and “vowing”) in that it does not necessarily have to involve an undertaking for or against the hearer (*op. cit.* 192-194).

5. In their discussion on the identification of speech acts, Taavitsainen and Jucker note that “many speech acts, perhaps most, are not realised with an explicit speech act verb” (2007: 110).

4. Promises as speech acts

As examples of the strongest IFIDs for commitment in the English language, Searle gives the phrases “I promise” and “I hereby promise” (1969: 58). They belong to a larger group of English commissives, which also features the verbs *commit*, *threaten*, *vow*, *pledge*, *swear*, *accept*, *consent*, *refuse*, *offer*, *bid*, *assure*, *guarantee*, *warrant*, *contract*, *covenant* and *bet* (Searle and Vanderveken 1985: 192).

Even though promises can take different forms, they are a rather clear-cut category of speech acts, i.e. they lack most of the fuzziness discussed, for example, by Jucker and Taavitsainen (2000: 69). According to Searle, in order to qualify as a promise, a speech act must fulfil several conditions: first, the thing promised must be something the hearer wants, and the speaker must know this to be the case. Second, the thing promised must be something that will not happen in the normal course of events. These are the preparatory conditions. If the promise is sincere, the speaker must intend to do the thing he or she promises and he or she must also believe that it is possible; this is the “sincerity condition”. A promise is also an undertaking of an obligation to perform a specific act, and, if the speaker does not have the intention to undertake the obligation, the utterance does not qualify as a promise. This is the “essential condition” (Searle 1969: 60).⁶

Consequently, under Searle’s terms, a promise given according to a certain formula, in other words using specific IFIDs, creates an obligation from the promiser to the promisee, except when the promise has been given insincerely; in that case the promise fails to fulfil the essential condition and is not a promise at all. Arnovick notes that promises “do more than express intention... through them a speaker experiences agency. The utterance of a performative actually initiates a change in reality” (1994: 127). This is, of course, particularly true with a binding promise; the obligation itself is a change in reality, and serious matters can be at stake.

However, the failure to fulfil the essential condition does not always affect the outcome; in a literary context at least, we often encounter promises insincerely made (i.e. defective), but seriously taken; for example, in Chaucer’s *Franklin’s Tale*, even a promise made in jest (4) counts as a “real” promise if the promisee takes it seriously.⁷

6. Searle and Vanderveken observe that it is, however, “possible to express a psychological state that one does not have, and that is how sincerity and insincerity in speech acts are distinguished. An insincere speech act is one in which the speaker performs a speech act and thereby expresses a psychological state even though he does not have that state ... an insincere promise is one where the speaker does not in fact intend to do the things he promises to do. An insincere speech act is defective but not necessarily unsuccessful” (1985: 18).

7. Interesting variations of fictional promises – though slightly outside the scope of this study – are also “hidden promises” and “false oaths”, manipulative tools used often by female characters in romances (see Ferrante 1988: 216).

5. The “binding promise” in the medieval period

The opening quote from the Franklin’s Tale, which I have used to serve as an introduction to the subject matter of this study, can be considered as summing up the medieval attitude to giving one’s word, such as it is when encountered in literature. The context of this quote is as follows: the speaker, Arveragus, has learned from his beloved wife that she has promised to love another man on a condition that she has deemed impossible to fulfil, but, against all odds, the man seems to have fulfilled this condition. Arveragus’ only solution to her dilemma is that she must keep her promise, because “trouthe is the hyeste thyng that man may kepe” – a promise given is binding and sacred, even when the promiser has given conditions she would never have expected to be met. Jill Mann refers to Dorigen’s promise as her own, independent action, the implications of which she herself must live out (1991: 116); this view very importantly underlines the significance of a commitment in the medieval period.

When we look at the speech act of promising in the Middle English period an important thing to bear in mind is the significance of orality in that cultural context. In a period where literacy was still rare, speech acts played an important role. Oral promises were considered binding, and the consequences of breaking one were public and private shame (Pulham 1996: 77). However, oral promises usually concerned more personal matters, such as betrothals; from very early on, for example, property and land transactions tended to be legal only when written documents were involved. Clanchy notes that by 1307, “literate modes were familiar even to serfs, who used charters for conveying property and whose rights and obligations were beginning to be regularly recorded in manorial rolls” (1979: 2). For a marriage vow, however, all that was needed, according to the canon law, was a mutual promise; no witnesses, no Church blessing, no consummation were required to constitute a legally binding marriage; only “two individuals speaking words of present consent” (Kittel 1980: 125).⁸

Indeed, several of the promises in my material involve love, marriage, or sexual relationships outside the marital context. Another important context for promises is that of honour; for example, the promiser may commit himself to doing something unpleasant in the future; because he possesses the chivalric virtue of honour, giving his word is enough. Promises of love are equally binding, and keeping them is also a question of honour.

The concept of honour is central in courtly or chivalric society; this becomes clear in, for example, Chaucer’s depiction of his Knight in the *Canterbury Tales*: “A knyght ther was, and that a worthy man,/ That fro the tyme that he first bigan/ To riden out, he

8. However, while an oral promise was enough to constitute a marriage, written documents could also be involved; in Chaucer’s Merchant’s Tale, for example, the union between January and May is preceded by an extensive amount of paperwork, as the narrator explains: “I trowe it were to longe yow to tarie/ If I yow tolde of every scrit and bond/ By which that she was feffed in his lond” (IV (E) 1696-1698).

loved chivalrie,/ Trouthe and honour, fredom and curteisie” (I (A) 43–46) “There was a Knight, a most distinguished man,/ Who from the day on which he first began/ To ride abroad had followed chivalry,/ Truth, honour, generous thought and courtesy.”⁹

Oral commitments, and their role in the relationships between characters, apparently interested Chaucer a great deal; as Jean Jost puts it, “the language of promises – their making, breaking, and dispensing, is a reverberating chord running through almost all the tales, as well as their framing device” (2004: 270). Promises and varying motives behind them form the very centre of the Franklin’s Tale, the Clerk’s Tale, the Wife of Bath’s Tale and *Troilus and Criseyde*, and also figure prominently in the Friar’s and Shipman’s Tales. However, binding promises and their consequences are by no means unique to Chaucer’s works; many of his stories are retellings and translations of various sources, and problems arising from hasty promises are a common enough motif in these, as well as in many other contemporary or slightly later works.

6. The “magic words” – different ways of making a commitment

The material for this study has been gathered from several sources; starting with studying the occurrences of the noun *trouthe* and the verb *sweren*, and moving on to study the occurrences of several other verbs denoting promise. According to the *MED*, both *trouthe* and *sweren* can be used to express more than one meaning; *trouthe* can mean, among other things (the numbers refer to the entry numbering in the *MED*):

- 2 a. a promise, an undertaking; a commitment; a pledge of loyalty
- 2 b. a marriage or betrothal vow; a promise of marriage
- 2 c. a concrete token of a promise; also, a written pledge
- 3 a. honor, integrity; adherence to one’s plighted word; also, nobility of character, knightly honor, adherence to the chivalric ideal

Sweren can refer to a declaration, to swearing an actual, binding oath, or to uttering a profanity:

- 1 a. To utter an oath; make a solemn or ceremonial declaration with an appeal to a deity, sacred object, etc.
- 2 a. To promise by an oath, take an oath by way of a solemn promise
- 5. To use (a sacred name) in an oath, appeal to or invoke (a deity, God’s bones, the heart of Christ, etc.) by an oath.

9. All modern English translations of the *Canterbury Tales* are from Nevill Coghill’s 1951 translation. I am not altogether happy with how many of the promises have been translated quite freely, but on the other hand, the obvious difficulty of finding modern equivalents for these promises seems to support my hypothesis that the actual speech act of promising has changed. I also consulted the translations by J. U. Nicholson (1934) and Frank Ernest Hill (1935) but found no significant differences.

6 a. To utter a profane oath, blaspheme, curse; use profane language habitually; also, utter an oath casually or as a mere intensive; swear as an expression of anger or annoyance, in an imprecation, or as a profane affirmation; (b) ~ adoun, to overwhelm (sb.) with cursing; (c) inf. as noun: habitual cursing, blaspheming.

Among the commissives listed in Searle and Vanderveken (1985: 192) is also *pledge*. In Middle English, the corresponding commissive is *plighten*, defined in the *MED* in the following way:

1a. To promise or pledge (sth. to sb.); -- with noun, inf. phr., or clause as obj.; (b) to pledge or promise (sth.); (c) to swear allegiance to (sb.), make a promise to (sb.); *refl.* ~ **togeder**, unite by oath in matrimony or fellowship; (d) *ppl.* **plight**, sworn, pledged; **ben plight**, to be bound by a vow, an agreement, etc.; (e) ~ **treuth**, ~ **fai**, to pledge faith, make a promise, give one's word; make vows of matrimony or betrothal; (f) as a mildly emphatic riming filler: **ich plighthe**, I swear, indeed; **ich the (you) plighthe, we the ~**, I (we) assure you; **the soth to ~**, to tell the truth; **ich plighthis**, I swear it [cp. *his pron.* (2) 2. (b)].

Another verb sometimes used in formulating promises is *wedden*. According to the *MED*, *wedden*, though usually referring to the act of marrying (*MED* entries 1(a) and (b)), can also denote a more general sense of promising:

2a. To bind (sb. or sth. to sth.), join, commit, pledge; unite (sb. with sth.), join; -- usu. in passive;
2b. chiefly in parenthetical expressions and asseverations: to wager (one's life, head, or ears), bet; wager (one's head on sth.) [quot. a1500(a1400)]; also, promise (sth.); give a promise (to sb.)

Yet another verb for promising is *bihighten* (also e.g. *bihoten*, *biheten*; *MED*):

1a. To promise (sth.); promise (to do sth.); -- (a) with obj.; (b) with clause; (c) with inf. phrase.
1b. (a) To make or give a promise (to sb.); promise; ~ **fair**, **wel**, promise sincerely or with good intentions; (b) ~ **bi)hest**, ~ **behot**, to give a promise.
2. To promise solemnly, pledge, vow; vow (chastity, etc.), ~ **vou**; pledge (loyalty); ~ to God, ~ on halidom, ~ upon trouthe, ~ with oth, etc.; promise (sb.) in marriage; pledge one's troth; -- (a) with obj.; (b) with clause; (c) with inf. phrase; (d) alone.

Promises are sometimes referred to by using the noun *bihiste* / *biheste*, derived from *bihighten*. In the *MED* **bihest**(e (n.)) Also (early) **behese**, **biheaste**, **-hæste**:

1 a. (a) A promise or pledge; also, what is promised; **bihoten**, **maken ~**, make a promise; **bilesten**, **fulfillen**, **holden ~**, keep or carry out a promise; **breken ~**; (b) **lond of ~**, the Promised Land [see also quotes. under **lond**].

For my material, I have tried to select only examples of such occurrences of these words in which the context explains that the commitment made is considered binding

– i.e. the promiser will face a situation where he/she has to honour his/her obligation. Usually, in these obligations serious matters are at stake: one’s life, one’s hand in marriage, one’s total obedience or one’s virtue, and honouring these promises will consequently come at a high price.

7. The texts studied

Below, I shall give the passages in which the binding promises have been found, along with a brief background for each text to explain why I have considered them to be relevant for this study. These have been organised so that the Chaucer passages are first, followed by their analogues. Many of the passages are extracts of dialogue which either record the actual promise between the promiser and the promisee, or the elicitation of a promise, or are examples of the promisers referring to the promise when relating the events to someone else. In several examples from the Franklin’s Tale – (5)–(10), (12)–(13), (15), (20)–(21) – and *Troilus and Criseyde* – (42), (47)–(49) – it is either the promisee or a third party who refers back to the promise. Sometimes the speech act of promising is not actually included in the dialogue, but related by the narrator.

The actual promises – examples (2), (4), the first token in (14), (16), (23), the first token in (27), (28)¹⁰, (31), the second token in (39), (40), and (44) – can be categorised as examples of the “performative use” of speech acts, because they create an obligation, and thus have the power of changing reality for the promiser. Obviously, all instances where the promises are referred to represent the “descriptive use” of speech acts. However, the examples containing elicitations of promises – (22), (26), (29), (30), and the first token in (39) – form a special category, since they form the first part of an adjacency pair in which the preferred second part¹¹ is the performative.

7.1 The Franklin’s Tale

The subject matter of the Franklin’s Tale is the making, keeping and breaking of promises; therefore, as can be expected, the number of relevant passages is high. The marriage contract between Arveragus and Dorigen, to begin with, includes several promises:

First, he swears an oath to her; this speech act is described by the narrator:

- (1) Of his free wyl he **swoor hire** as a knyght (V (F) 745)
 ‘He freely gave his promise as a knight’

Then, a troth – corresponding to the *MED* entry 2. (b); ‘a promise of marriage’ – is given by Dorigen, when she pledges herself to Arveragus:

10. This example is, in fact, performative as well as descriptive; the hag promises to acquit the knight of his promise, so she is both making a promise and referring to his promise.

11. See Levinson (1983: 307).

- (2) Sire, I wol be youre humble trewe wyf –
Have heer my trouthe – til that myn herte breste. (V (F) 757–758)
 ‘Sir, I will be your true and humble wife,
 Accept my truth of heart, or break, my brest!’

The couple’s mutual harmony is strengthened by further promises, reported by the narrator:

- (3) And therefore hath this wise, worthy knyght
 To lyve in ese, suffrance **hire bihight**,
 And she to hym ful wisly **gan to swere**
 That nevere sholde ther be defaute in here. (V (F) 787–789)
 ‘And so this wise and honourable knight
 Promised forbearance to her that he might
 Live more easily, and she as kind
 Promised there never would be fault to find
 In her.’

The promise most central to the storyline is again made by Dorigen, this time jestingly, to get rid of an unwanted admirer, Aurelius (see also Pakkala-Weckström 2002):

- (4) **have heer my trouthe**, in al that evere I kan (V (F) 998)
 ‘Accept my word in truth for all it’s worth’

Dorigen sets Aurelius an impossible condition, and announces that if he meets it, then she will love him. Even though the promise takes the same formula as (2), it cannot be understood as a promise of marriage, because Dorigen is already married, and this is also known to the promisee; therefore, “loving” Aurelius can, in this context be interpreted as a promise to become his mistress, should he fulfil the condition.

When Aurelius unexpectedly appears to have succeeded, Dorigen faces the dilemma of having made two similar binding promises to two different men.¹² She is reminded of her second promise, first by the promisee, Aurelius:

- (5) Awyseth yow er that ye **breke youre trouthe** (V (F) 1320)
 ‘Your pity, think before you break your word’
 (6) For, madame, wel ye woot what ye **han hight** (v (F) 1323)
 ‘You know what you have promised to requite’
 (7) Ye woot right wel what ye **bihighten me**;
 And **in myn hand youre trouthe plighen** ye (V (F) 1327–1328)
 ‘You made a promise which you know must stand

12. Arnovick argues that, despite its form, Dorigen’s second promise is actually not a promise at all (1994: 135); however, the consequences she later faces prove that, nonetheless, her utterance has had the perlocutionary effect of a promise.

And gave your plighted truth into my hand’

- (8) Dooth as yow list; have **youre biheste** in mynde (V (F) 1335)
 ‘Do as you please but think of what you said’

Then the matter is taken up by her husband, Arveragus, who also insists that she keep her promise:

- (9) Ye shul youre **trouthe holden**, by my fay! (V (F) 1474)
 ‘you must keep your word’
- (10) But if ye sholde youre **trouthe kepe and save**.
Trouthe is the hyste thyng that man may **kepe** – (V (F) 1478–1479)
 ‘The very love I bear you
 Bids you keep truth, in that I cannot spare you
 Truth is the highest thing in a man’s keeping.’

While examples (5)–(9), and the first reference in (10), all refer to Dorigen’s promise in (4), in the second line of example (10), the “trouthe” that Arveragus is referring to is an abstract, corresponding perhaps best to *MED* entry 3. (a); ‘honor, integrity, adherence to one’s plighted word’.

Dorigen’s next encounter with Aurelius portrays her in great distress. She refers to her unfortunate promise in the following way:

- (11) And she answerde, half as she were mad,
 “Unto the gardyn, as myn housbonde bad,
 My **trouthe for to holde** – allas, allas!” (V (F) 1511–1513)
 ‘And she replied as one half driven mad,
 Why, to the garden, as my husband bade
 To keep my plighted word, alas, alas!’

Dorigen’s agony finally seems to open Aurelius’s eyes, too. Shamefaced, he wonders about her husband’s generosity regarding her promise; these references, too, are to example (4):

- (12) And of Arveragus, the worthy knyght,
 That bad **hire holden al that she had hight**,
 So looth hym was his wyf sholde **breke hir trouthe** (V (F) 1517–1519)
 ‘And for Arveragus the noble knight
 That bade her keep her word of honour white
 So loth he was that she should break her truth.’

Finally, Dorigen’s ordeal ends with a formal release by Aurelius, preceded by his continuing astonishment over her husband’s generosity:

- (13) That him were levere han shame (and that were routhe)

Than ye to me sholde **breke thus youre trouthe**,
I have wel levere evere to suffer wo
Than I departe the love bitwix you two
I yow relese, madame, into youre hond
Quyrt every serement and every bond
That ye han maad to me as heerbiform (V (F) 1526–1535)

'Knowing the shame that he would rather take
(And that were pity) than that you should break
Your plighted word, I'd rather suffer too
Than seek to come between his love and you.
So, Madam, I release into your hand
All bonds or deeds of covenant that stand
Between us, and suppose all treaties torn
You may have made with me since you were born.'

The legal vocabulary here is in accordance with the seriousness of the promise (see also Crane 1994: 37). This is followed by yet another pledge: the promisee, Aurelius, in turn promises Dorigen not to bother her about the earlier promise, i.e. first we have a performative speech act, then a reference to Dorigen's promise (4):

- (14) My **trouthe I plighte**, I shal yow never repreve,
Of no **biheste**, and heere I take my leve (V (F) 1537–1538)

'I give my word never to chide or grieve you
For any promise given, and so I leave you,'

Prior to this, Aurelius has made a pact with a magician in order to fulfil Dorigen's seemingly impossible condition. In this he is helped by his brother, who makes a reference to Dorigen's obligation:

- (15) Thanne moste she nedes **holden hire biheste**
Or elles he shal shame hire atte leeste. (V (F) 1163–1164)

'She will be forced to recognize his claim
Or else she will at least be put to shame'

In this extract, the consequences of not honouring one's promises are clearly stated. Significantly, in the Middle English version the subject is *he*, referring to the promisee ('he will shame her at least'), which suggests that Aurelius has a right to make the affair public if Dorigen will not honour her promise. The formal acquittal in the preceding examples also seems to point to this.

In order to fulfil Dorigen’s impossible condition, Aurelius has promised to pay the magician a large sum of money. This promise does not contain any of the IFIDs listed in 6; yet it is clearly a performative:

- (16) Fy on a thousand pound!
 This wyde world, which that men seye is round,
 I wolde it yeve, If I were lord of it.
This bargayn is ful dryve, for we been knyht.
 Ye shal be payed trewely, by my trouthe! (V (F) 1227–1231)
- ‘Fie on a thousand pound!
 I’d give the world, which people say is round’
 The whole wide world if it belonged to me;
 Call it a bargain then, for I agree
 You shall be truly paid, on my oath.’

After releasing Dorigen, Aurelius realises that he still has his debt to pay (17)–(18), and he promises to honour his commitment (19) while he explains why he failed to achieve his aim (20)–(21). Examples (17) and (18) represent Aurelius’s solitary anguish, (19)–(21) are lines addressed to the magician:

- (17) “Allas!” quod he. “Allas, that I **bihighte**
 Of pured gold a thousand pound of wighte (V (F) 1559–1560)
- “Alas,” said he, “alas that I am bound
 To pay in solid gold a thousand pound’
- (18) My **trouthe wol I kepe**, I wol nat lye. (V (F) 1570)
 ‘But I will keep my truth, I will not lie.’
- (19) Maister, I dar wel make avaunt,
 I **failed nevere of my trouthe** as yit (V (F) 1577)
- “Sir, I can boast, in making this request,”
 He said, “I’ve never failed my word as yet’
- (20) Arveragus, of gentillesse,
 Hadde levere dye in sorwe and in distresse
 Than that his wyf **were of hir trouthe fals** (V (F) 1595–1597)
- ‘Her husband, in his nobleness,
 Would have preferred to die in his distress
 Rather than that his wife should break her word.’
- (21) And that **hir trouthe she swoor** thurgh innocence (V (F) 1601)
 ‘Her vow was made in innocent confusion’

In these final examples from the Franklin’s Tale, the unfortunate Aurelius is referring to two different promises: the promise he made to the magician (16) in order to force Dorigen to honour her promise to him (4). The noble behaviour of Dorigen’s husband makes

him regret his actions and release Dorigen of her promise, but he is left with his debt to the magician, which he intends to honour nonetheless (17) and (18). In (19), the reference is more abstract (*MED* 3. (a)), it means that Aurelius has never broken his word before.

7.2 The Wife of Bath's Tale and its analogues

In the Wife of Bath's Tale, a pact is made by the hag and the knight; in exchange for information which will – hopefully – save his life, the knight makes a promise. The extracts below form an adjacency pair, the first part of which is a formulaic elicitation of a binding promise, obviously accompanied by an outstretched hand; the second part is the performative speech act:

- (22) “**Plight me thy trouthe heere in myn hand,**” quod she, (III (D) 1009)
 “Give me your hand,” she said, “and swear to do”
- (23) “**Have heer my trouthe,**” quod the knyght, “I grante.” (III (D) 1013)
 “Upon my honour, he answered, “I agree”

To the knight's utmost horror, the next thing that the hag requires is his hand in marriage, referring to his promise (23). The request is made in court, addressed to the queen, and even though the actual promise was made in a more intimate setting with no witnesses, the knight has to honour it.

- (24) For which he **plighte me his trouthe** there (III (D) 1051)
 ‘For which he swore and pledged his honour to it’

The knight, in desperation, tries to offer an alternative, but he does not deny his promise:

- (25) I woot right wel that swich was my **biheste**.
 For Goddes love, as chees a newe requeste!
 Taak al my good and lat my body go. (III (D) 1059–1061)
 ‘I know indeed that such was my behest,
 But for God's love think of a new request,
 Take all my goods, but leave my body free.’

The hag, however, sticks to her original demand, and despite the knight's lamentations the narrator tells us that “he constreyned was; he nedes moste hire wedde” (III (D) 1071). The knight has, then, made a promise which is clearly binding, and has to suffer the consequences, i.e. marry the old woman.

In their contribution to *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales II*, Withrington and Field name three analogues to the Wife of Bath's Tale: Gower's “Tale of Florent” from *Confessio Amantis*, which is more or less contemporary with the *Canterbury Tales*; the anonymous poem *The Weddyng of Syr Gawen and Dame Ragnell*; and the ballad *The Marriage of Sir Gawain*. The latter two are significantly later versions of the tale of the loathly lady, probably composed in the sixteenth century (Withrington

and Field 2005: 407–408). Each of these three tales contains the “binding promise”-motif, though there are some obvious differences, and the actual exchange is missing in one manuscript.

In Gower’s version of the tale, some interesting bargaining takes place: the knight agrees to marry the old hag if it is his only way of saving himself:

- (26) Thou schalt me **leve such a wedd** pledge
 That I wol **have thi trowthe in hond**
 That thou schalt be myn housebonde (163–165)
- (27) **Have hier myn hond**, I schal thee wedde
 And thus **his trowthe he leith to wedde** (192–193) give, pledge

Here, in (26), the hag elicits a promise of marriage from the knight; the first line in (27) is the performative, and the second line is the narrator’s confirmation that the promise was indeed given.

The hag, in turn, promises to release him from his promise if he finds another way of keeping his life:

- (28) If eny other thing
 Bot that thou hast of my techyng
 Fro deth thi body mai respite,
 I woll thee **of thi trowthe acquite**, (197–199) promise, release

This utterance by the hag underlines the sacred nature of the promise; her counter-promise to acquit the knight in case her advice will not be needed clearly implies that without it the knight would have been bound by his word even if he could have found another way out of his plight.

In the two later versions of the story, both the promiser and the promisee are different characters altogether: in both versions, it is King Arthur who gives the promise, which leads to Gawain’s marriage. The promisee is a mysterious knight, who threatens to kill Arthur. In *The Weddyng of Syr Gawen and Dame Ragnell* the promise sequence does not contain any of the previously mentioned “magic words” – in fact, it does not even contain a clear promise, but rather three different fractions: first, the king hastens to say “lo, here my hand” (88) even before he has heard his enemy’s terms; these fractions are elicited by the knight asking King Arthur twice to swear by his sword:

- (29) thou shalt **swere** upon my sword *broun* (90) bright
 (30) thou shalt **swere** upon my swerd good (94)

The second part of this adjacency pair is not a clear promise:

- (31) Syr, I **graunt to thys**, now lett me gone; agree
 Though itt be to me full *loth* repellent
 I ensure the, as I am true Kyng,
 To com again att thys xii monethes [endyng] (101–104)

However, when Arthur later narrates the events to Gawain he refers to them in the following terms:

- (32) He **made me to swere** that att the xii monethes end,
That I shold mete hym ther in the same kynde,
To that I **plight my trowith**. (167–169)

So, in this case the obligation exists for the promiser even though he has not uttered any actual IFIDs, but rather just agreed to his enemy's terms. Clearly, then, the agreement in (31) has the force of a performative speech act.

In *The Marriage of Sir Gawain*, the promise sequence is actually missing due to the poor condition of the manuscript, but the storyline closely follows that of *The Wedding of Syr Gawen and Dame Ragnell*, and again there is a reference to the promise in Arthur's account to Gawain:

- (33) I must come agayne, as **I am sworne** (46).

7.3 The Friar's Tale and Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*

In the Friar's Tale, the greedy summoner makes a deal with the devil (although he does not know the identity of the stranger at that point). The deal is not included in the dialogue, but the narrator explains that

- (34) Everych in ootheres hand his trouthe leith,
For to be **sworne** bretheren til they deye. (III (D) 1404–1405)
'The pair of them shook hands upon the spot,
Swore to be brothers to their dying day'

When he finds out that he has been dealing with the devil, the summoner refuses to take back his troth, saying:

- (35) My **trouthe wol I holde**, as in this cas.
For though thou were the devel Sathanas,
My **trouthe wol I holde** to my brother,
As I **am sworn**, and ech of us til oother (III (D) 1525–1528).
'I wouldn't leave a brother on the shelf,
No, not if you were Lucifer himself!
I keep my word of honour to a brother,
And so I will to you. We bound each other
In brotherhood, that was the bargain made,'

Interestingly, some two centuries later, Christopher Marlowe's Faustus will have to give more than his mere word when he makes his notorious pact with Lucifer:

- (36) *Faustus*. Lo, Mephostophilis, for love of thee
Faustus hath cut his arm and with his proper blood

Assures his soul to be great Lucifer's
 Chief lord and regent of perpetual night.
 View this blood that tricles from mine arm
 And let it be propitious for my wish.

- (37) *Mephostophilis*. But Faustus,
 Write it in manner of a deed of gift.

So, in Faustus's case, instead of an oral promise, he will have to give his promise in writing “in manner of a deed of gift” and the writing must be done in his own blood. The promisee, Mephostophilis, however, only gives an oral oath in return:

- (38) *Mephostophilis*. Faustus, I swear by hell and Lucifer

7.4 The Clerk's Tale

In the Clerk's Tale, the marriage contract between Walter and Griselda is achieved by swearing a mutual oath, with Walter first stating his condition of total obedience, and finishing by saying:

- (39) Swere this,
 and heere I swere oure alliance (IV (F) 357).
 ‘Swear this and I will swear to our alliance’

Griselda's response is similarly an oath:

- (40) And heere I swere that nevere willyngly,
 In werk ne thoght, I nyl yow disobeye, (IV (F) 362–363)
 ‘And here I promise never willingly
 To disobey in deed or thought or breath’

In this exchange, the adjacency pair is formed by the imperative in the first line of (39) and (40); Walter's own oath in (39) is a performative similar to that of Griselda's, though conditional. Quite famously, Griselda honours her oath even when her children are supposedly killed, and here Walter reminds her of it; the context is the removal of their daughter:

- (41) Shewe now youre pacience in youre werkyng,
 That ye me **highte and swore** in youre village
 That day that maked was oure marriage. (IV (F) 495–497)
 ‘Summon your patience, show me that they were meant,
 Those promises you gave me to obey,
 Down in your village on our wedding-day.’

Walter, too, stays true to his oath, even though he pretends to divorce Griselda, and thus appears, to both her and his subjects, to have actually broken his promise.

Like the knight's and the summoner's promises, Griselda's oath, too, is given without knowledge of its consequences: when she promises her future husband unquestioning obedience, she cannot be expected to realise it will mean giving up her children to what she thinks is certain death, or being thrown out of her house wearing but a shirt to make room for a younger and more noble bride.

7.5 Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* and Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*

Troilus and Criseyde is a story of love and betrayal, and consequently the making and breaking of promises play an important role. Sheila Fisher notes that, in the character of Troilus, as well as in the story itself, "'trouthe' is the essence of chivalric virtue" (2000: 158).

In this first example, Criseyde's uncle, Pandarus, is addressing Criseyde, and reminding her of her promise to Troilus:

- (42) Ye woot youreself, as wel as any wight,
 How that youre love al fully graunted is
 To Troilus, the worthieste knyght,
 Oon of this world, and therto **trouthe yplight**,
 That, but it were on hym along, ye nolde
 Hym nevere falsen while ye lyven sholde. (III 778–784)
- 'Why do I say all this? You know quite well,
 Better than any, that your love is plighted
 To Troilus, who, as anyone can tell,
 Is one of the finest fellows ever knighted;
 You made him feel his feelings were requited
 And that, except for fault in him, you never
 Would play him false, though you should live for ever.'¹³

Here Troilus is addressing Pandarus, explaining his commitment to Criseyde, i.e. this is yet another example of the descriptive use of a speech act:

- (43) For Pandarus, syn I **have trouthe hire hight**,
 I wol nat ben untrewed for no wight,
 But as hire man I wol ay lyve and sterve,
 And nevere other creature serve. (IV 445–448)
- 'I have sworn truth to her and that is done.
 I will not be untrue for anyone;
 I live and die her man, I will not swerwe;
 No other living creature will I serve.'

13. The modern English citations of *Troilus and Criseyde* are from the translation by Nevill Coghill (1971).

In book IV the main characters have a long and highly emotional conversation, in which many oaths are sworn and pledges referred to, particularly by Criseyde, as she gets ready to leave Troy. Since the outcome of the story is that she betrays Troilus and thus breaks all her promises, I had some initial reservations about whether these speech acts should be included in this study. However, since it is precisely the fact that she does break her promises that constitutes Criseyde's betrayal, it follows that the promises should be regarded as binding. The narrator also points out that Criseyde believes in what she says at the time: "al this thyng was seyde of good entente,/ And that hire herte trewe was and kynde/ Towardes hym, and spak right as she mente" (IV 1416–1418) 'all she said was said with good intent/ And that her heart was true as it was kind/ Towards him, and she spoke just what she meant'. I did not, however, include Criseyde's final oath of love: "in hire lettre made she swich festes/ That wonder was, and swerth she loveth hym best" (V 1429–1430) 'Her letter fawned on him and sang his praises/ She swore she loved him best'; even Troilus dismisses her letter as "botmeles bihestes" (promises without foundation, V 1431).

The lovers quarrel over Criseyde's decision, and Troilus suspects that her father will marry her off to someone else, leaving him alone, holding to his promise to her: "And Troilus, of whom ye nyl han routhe,/ Shal causeless so sterven in his trouthe" (IV 1476–1477) 'And Troilus, whom you will never pity,/ Firm in his truth, will perish in this city'. Criseyde's reply is very dramatic; if for any reason – and the list is long – she should be untrue to him, may she "with body and soule synke in helle" (IV 1554) 'let me sink, body and soul, to Hell!'; she swears:

- (44) And this on every god celestial
 I **swere it yow**, and ek on ech goddesse, (IV 1541–1542)
 'And this I swear by every god supernatural,
 And every goddess too and patroness,'

And she continues in a similar vein:

- (45) Mistrust me nought thus causeles, for routhe,
 Syn to be trewe I **have yow plight my trouthe** (IV 1609–1610)
 'Mistrust me not without a cause, unheard,
 Untried, for pity's sake! You have my word.'
- (46) But, certes, I am naught so nyce a wight
 That I ne kan ymaginen a wey
 To come ayeyn that day that I **have hight**. (IV 1625–1627)
 'Am I so foolish that I never could
 Imagine anything, or find a way
 Of coming back the day I said I would?'

While Crisedyde joins her father and the other Greeks, Troilus awaits her return to Troy in agony, and the narrator refers to her promise:

(47) But often was his herte hoot and cold,
 And namely that ilke nynthe nyght,
 Which on the morwe she **hadde hym bihight**
 To com ayeyn. (V 1102–1105)

‘And many a time his heart went hot and cold,
 And more especially upon the night
 -The ninth – before the day he had the right
 To hope for her – she had her word to keep.’

After Criseyde has indeed broken every promise she has made to Troilus, she reflects upon her own behaviour and its implications: “Allas, for now is clene ago/ my name of trouthe in love, for everemo!/ for I have falsed oon the gentilleste/ that evere was, and oon the worthieste! (V 1054–1057) “Alas!” she said “that I must now forgo/ My name for truth in love, for ever! Oh,/ I have betrayed the gentlest and the best/ That ever was, finest and worthiest.’ But Troilus cannot forget her, he keeps sending her letters in which, according to the narrator, he tries to persuade her to return by reminding her of her promise:

(48) Bisechyng hire that sithen he was trewe,
 That she wol come ayeyn and **holde hire trouthe**. (V 1585–1586)
 ‘Beseeching her that, since he had been true,
 She would return again and keep her oath’

Criseyde’s reply to his letter makes Troilus doubtful, but he still cannot believe that she would not keep her promise to him:

(49) But fynaly, he ful ne trowen myghte
 That she ne wolde hym **holden that she hyghte** (V 1635–1636)
 ‘But finally, for all that had occurred,
 He could not think she would not keep her word’

Shakespeare’s Troilus and Cressida also exchange lovers’ vows before spending the night together. Pandarus, who, in this version is Cressida’s cousin, prompts Troilus thus: “Here she is now. Swear the oaths now to her that you have sworn to me”(3.2). But the following vows do not contain any speech acts of promising, they mainly serve as clues to the outcome of the story:

(50) Troilus: O virtuous fight,
 When right with right wars who shall be most right!
 True swains in love shall in the world to come
 Approve their truth by Troilus. When their rhymes,

Full of protest, of oath, and big compare,
 Want smiles, truth tired with iteration –
 ‘As true as steel, as plantage to the moon,
 As sun to day, as turtle to her mate,
 As iron to adamant, as earth to th’ centre’ –
 Yet, after all comparisons of truth,
 As truth’s authentic author to be cited,
 ‘As true as Troilus’ shall crown up the verse
 And sanctify the numbers.

- (51) Cressida: Prophet may you be!
 If I be false, a swerve a hair from truth,
 When time is old and hath forgot itself,
 When waterdrops have worn the stones of Troy,
 And blind oblivion swallowed cities up,
 And mighty states characterless are grated
 To dusty nothing, yet let memory,
 From false to false, among false maids in love,
 Upbraid my falsehood! When they’ve said, ‘as false
 As air, as water, wind or sandy earth,
 As fox to lamb, a wolf to heifer’s calf,
 Pard to the hind, or stepdame to her son,
 Yea, let them say, to stick the heart of falsehood,
 ‘As false as Cressid.’ (3.2)

Pandarus is satisfied with this exchange, and urges the lovers to finalise their bargain by a handshake:

- (52) Go to, a bargain made. Seal it, seal it. I’ll be the witness. Here I hold your hand; here my cousin’s. If ever you prove false to one another, since I have taken such pains to bring you together, let all pitiful goers-between be called to the world’s end after my name – call them all Pandars. Let all constant men be Troiluses, all false women Cressids, and all brokers-between Pandars! Say ‘Amen.’ (3.2)

There are many interesting elements here: the whole exchange of vows is clearly more formal than in the earlier version of the story: Pandarus talks about “a bargain” and “sealing”, and offers to act as witness – he even stands between the two, participating in the hand-shake. Yet the actual “vows” include none of the formulaic expressions present in Chaucer’s version. While in the dialogue of Chaucer’s couple, promises play a central role, Shakespeare’s lovers stress fidelity, being “true”, and not “false”.

In the lovers' parting scene, instead of giving promises like Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde, Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida have a heated discussion on the subject of "being true":

- (53) Troilus
Hear me, my love: be thou but true of heart –
- (54) Cressida
I true! How now! What wicked deem is this?
- (55) Troilus
Nay, we must use expostulation kindly,
For it is parting from us.
I speak not 'be thou true' as fearing thee,
For I will throw my glove to Death himself
That there is no maculation in thy heart;
But 'be thou true' say I, to fashion in
My sequent protestation – be thou true,
And I will see thee.
- (56) Cressida
O, you shall be exposed, my lord, to dangers
As infinite as imminent! But I'll be true.
- (57) Troilus
And I'll grow friend with danger. Wear this sleeve.
- (58) Cressida
And you this glove. When shall I see you?
- (59) Troilus
I will corrupt the Grecian sentinels
To give thee nightly visitation.
But yet, be true.
- (60) Cressida
O heavens! 'Be true' again! (4.4)

Unlike Criseyde, who quite freely swears to remain faithful and promises to return, Cressida, it would appear, feels somewhat put off by the idea that she would need to give any assurances of her fidelity. However, at the moment of their parting, she in turn asks Troilus: "My lord, will you be true?" (4.4).

8. The magic words in use

The notion of an illocutionary act is closely associated with verbs – IFIDs are always, in Searle's categories, verbs. In the Middle English semantic field of promises, however,

the noun *trouthe* seems to play an important role, since binding promises can be made, kept and broken by using a combination of the noun and various different verbs:

8.1 *Haven + trouthe*

Instances of making a binding promise by using *trouthe* with the verb *haven* are found in (2), (4) and (23); all of these speech acts are performative, and they all follow the formula *have + heere + trouthe*. In addition to these, there is one example of elicitation of a promise with *haven* (26). In my material, there are no examples of the descriptive use of *trouthe + haven*.

8.2 *Plighten + trouthe*

The combination of *trouthe* with the verb *plighten* occurs six times in the material. One of the examples is performative: the first token in (14); one is an elicitation (22); the other four are descriptive: the second token in (7), (24), the second token in (32), and (45).

A headword search in *The Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse* yields several combinations of *trouthe* and *plighten*, e.g. in *The romance of Guy of Warwick*: “And my trouthe y plighte the / That y ne shall the harme doo”; “For goddis loue, sir, haue pitee nowe then: / For the trouthe thou hast me plighte”; “Lordinges, y haue my trouthe plighte / To him ye there lede, that knighte”; “Truthe betwene them there they plighte.” There is also one occurrence of “troth-plighting” in *Le morte Arthur*, a romance in stanzas of eight lines; re-edited from ms. Harley 2252, in the British Museum: “There-to bothe there handis vp-held / And trewly there trouthis plighte.” Of these findings, the first seems to be a performative, all the others are clearly descriptive.

8.3 Other means of making promises with *trouthe*

Three other verbs are also used in making a promise with *trouthe*: *leien* in the second token in (27), and the first token in (34); *sweren* in (21) and *highten* in (43). A combination of *trouthe* and *sweren* can also be found in Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*: “The trouthe, which to hire afore/ He hadde in thyle of Colchos swore.” All of these are descriptive.

8.4 Keeping, breaking or acquitting of a promise with *trouthe*

References to keeping promises are made by using a combination of *trouthe* and *hold-en* (9), (11), in the first token in (35), the second token in (35) and (48); or *trouthe* and *kepen* (10) and (18). There are three references to breaking promises which use the combination *trouhte + breken*: (5), the second token in (12), and (13). The breaking of a promise is also referred to by *faillen of trouthe* (19) and *weren of trouthe fals* (20). Example (28) contains the combination *trouthe + acquiten of*.

8.5 Shaking hands to seal a promise

Also the idea of giving the *trouthe* into the hand of the promisee, i.e. shaking hands, occurs several times: in example (22), in the second token in (26), and in the first token in (34). In the *Book of the Duchess* the dead beloved is described by comparing her trustworthiness in the following way: “hir simple record/ was founde as trewe as any bond/ or trouthe of any mannes hond” (934–936). Shaking hands is referred to, though without the presence of *trouthe*, also in (27) first token, and in the first promise fracture by King Arthur in *The Weddyng of Syr Gawen and Dame Ragnell*. In the *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse*, there is a passage describing a hand-shake to seal a troth: “I sawh hem bothë trouthë plyht, / Hand in hand yboundë faste” in the 1426 translation of *The pilgrimage of the life of man* by John Lydgate. The *OED* also gives a couple of examples where the hand plays an important role in promising: (1440, *Sir Eglam*, 246): “‘here myn honde!’ Hys trowthe to hym he strake;” (1578, *T. N.* tr. *Conq. W. India*): “She demaunded him as hir husband by faith and troth of hand.”

The state of being under an obligation can be expressed by a participial form; e.g. in *The romance of Guy of Warwick* the participial is formed with *trouthe*: “To whom y was trouth-plighte.”

Sometimes also the noun *bihiste* / *biheste* is used; in example (15) Dorigen’s promise is referred to with a combination of *biheste* and *holden*; also example (8), the second token in (14), and (25) refer to a *trouthe* given earlier by using the synonym *bihiste*. These examples, however, are all descriptive; it would seem that *biheste* does not carry a performative force similar to *trouthe*. Finally, Gower’s version of the Loathly Lady demands “such a wedd” in the first token in (26) – i.e. such a promise.

8.6 Swearing

It would appear that although the verb *sweren* has a variety of different functions (see above)¹⁴, when it is used in the *MED* sense 2. (a), it is both synonymous with, and as equally binding as, pledging one’s troth – synonymous in the sense that the latter speech act is often used to mean ‘being sworn’; this can be seen in the above examples from the *Friar’s Tale* and *The Marriage of Sir Gawain*. A binding promise by swearing is also uttered in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* by Gawain, who promises King Arthur to meet with the green giant: “I swere the for soothe, and by my seker traweth” (403) ‘I swear to you truly and on my word of honour’. The promiser later refers to this speech act by saying: “I am boun” (548) ‘I am bound’. *Sweren* can occur in collocation with *heere*; cf. modern “I hereby...”. This is the case in both the second token in (39), and (40), which are both performative speech acts. Another performative use of *sweren*

14. For example, in *Troilus and Criseyde*, Pandarus, who acts as a middleman in his niece’s love-life, frequently uses the verb *sweren* in his persuasive speeches; it seems to be one of his favourite rhetorical devices.

can be found in (44); this time without *heere*. Promises are elicited by *sweren* in *The Weddyng of Syr Gawen and Dame Ragnell* (29), (30), and in the Clerk’s Tale (39). Examples (3) (second token) and the first token in (32) are descriptive.

Occasionally promises are made by using both *trouthe* and *sweren* together: for example, in the Shipman’s Tale the monk promises to help the lady by saying “I yow swere, and plighte yow my trouthe” (VII 198).¹⁵ In Chaucer’s *Book of the Duchess*, the Black Knight elicits a promise from the Dreamer by “swere thy trouthe therto” (753). In John Gower’s *Confessio amantis* there is also a combination of the two: “He swor and hath his trowthe pliht/ To be for evere hire oghne knyht”. In example (51) from the Clerk’s Tale, *sweren* occurs with *highte*.

8.7 Promising with *bihighten* / *highten* and *plighten*

Bihighten or *highten* occur on their own in the first token in (3), (6), the first tokens in (7) and (12), in (17), (46) and (47); in example (49) *highten* is combined with *holden*. All of these examples are descriptive. Of the various other means of making or referring to binding promises, by far the most common is by using the verb *plighten*. This verb usually occurs with *trouthe* as its direct object (see above), but is also sometimes found on its own. While there are no occurrences of *plighten* on its own in my examples, the *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse* yields several: e.g. in *The Romance of Guy of Warwick*. The story was a popular romance with an eponymous hero who battles monsters to prove his valour and win his lady. This context clearly suggests that the promises found by headword searches can be considered to be of a serious nature. Two of the hits clearly suggest performative uses of the verb: “In all my body, y the plighte”; “It is to you worship, y you plighte,” while the passages “To the Duke Otes y haue the plighte,/ Thy body to bringe him anone righte” and “That y shall his body burye:/ So y haue him plighte, trulye” are examples of descriptive uses.

In addition to the participial form *troth-plighte* (discussed above), the form *plighte* is also used; e.g. in *Guy of Warwick*: “So thurgh grete strength ther he [is] nome,/ And by treuthe his plighte man is become” and “Ouere all thing we loued in fere,/And of true loue plighte we were.”

9. Summary of ways of promising and eliciting promises

The problem for the researcher lies in the fact that quite obviously not all occurrences of these “magic words” constitute promises that can be considered binding, not even within the work of one author: in the *Canterbury Tales* several characters utter these words, but

15. The monk’s consequent behaviour casts a dubious light over this promise; after having received sexual favours from the lady in exchange for his help, he double-crosses her; therefore, this particular speech act is not on my list of binding promises in the *Canterbury Tales*.

not all of them consider themselves under any obligation – for example, the above mentioned monk in the Shipman's Tale is, as the context reveals, only making small talk.

To complicate matters further, while not all promises made by using the “magic words” are binding, there are also examples of binding promises made by using altogether different utterances: for example, the promise Aurelius makes to the Clerk of Orleans (16), and King Arthur's promise in *The Weddyng of Syr Gawen and Dame Ragnell* (31).

Furthermore, there seems to be a certain lack of a clear generic connection between true and false binding promises: even though it is most often characters in romances who utter the “magic words”, they need not be particularly noble figures. While there is no doubt about the nobility and heroic character of both King Arthur and Gawain, Griselda is a simple peasant's daughter; the knight in the Wife of Bath's Tale is a condemned criminal trying desperately to save his life; Dorigen is merely playing a cruel jest on her admirer (see e.g. Hansen 1992: 274); and the summoner in the Friar's Tale is acting out of greed.

My intention in this paper has been to shed some light on the nature of promises in the late Middle English period. The examples given here would seem to suggest that there are certain formulaic expressions or rather fixed collocations that constitute a binding contract. The intentions of the promiser are of secondary interest, i.e. Searle's essential condition does not necessarily apply. Dorigen, for example, gives her promise to Aurelius in jest; yet even her husband considers it binding. The knight in the Wife of Bath's Tale pledges himself to the old hag in desperation, King Arthur in the analogues to save his life, and the summoner in the Friar's Tale gives his *trouthe* to the devil himself out of stupidity and greed.

The validity of promises given by using *trouthe* or *sweren*, *plighen* or *bihighen* can be tested by anyone: in the case of the knight in the Wife of Bath's Tale, it is the promisee who insists upon the keeping of the contract. In the Franklin's Tale, both the promisee and the promiser's husband – to whom the promise is only hearsay – consider the contract binding, even though the promiser certainly never meant it, and in the Friar's Tale it is the promiser himself who absolutely refuses to take his promise back. Criseyde, on the other hand, laments how her “name of trouthe in love” is lost forever because of her broken promises. In the Clerk's Tale, Griselda stays true to her oath, even though she has to lose her children and her dignity in the process of keeping it, and Walter stays true to his oath, even though in the eyes of the world he has broken it. It would appear that the various speech acts of promising possess the power of making a binding contract in themselves, and that it does not have any bearing on the matter whether the words have been uttered sincerely or not. And, on the other hand, sometimes the promiser will consider the promise binding even when he has not uttered a formulaic speech act; still, the promiser feels as equally bound as one who has used the formulaic expressions.

These observations on the nature of binding promises seem to suggest that Searle's philosophical treatment of illocutionary acts does not cover every possible angle. The

performatives that make up a binding promise would appear to be so strong in themselves that they simply overrule the essential condition. This is partly explained by considering an obvious oversight of Searle’s theory: it concentrates on the speaker and his/her intentions and sincerity, disregarding the other participants, i.e. the promisee and a possible audience. So, the perlocutionary effects of these specific speech acts are somewhat disregarded.

However, in the medieval literary context, even the promisers themselves appear to honour obligations also when they have either not been sincere in their promises, or when they have entered into a commitment without knowing what it entails. This becomes quite clear in the Franklin’s Tale when Dorigen, realising that her admirer has met her impossible condition, never thinks of taking back her promise even though it was given “in pley” (V (F) 988); instead she immediately realises that she is in serious trouble: “He taketh his leve, and she astoned stood;/ In al hir face nas a drop of blood./ She wende nevere han come in swich a trappe.” (V (F) 1339–1) ‘He took his leave of her and left the place./ Without a drop of colour in her face/ She stood as thunderstruck by her mishap.’

So the “magic words” that constitute binding promises have enough power to entrap even the speaker. In other words, the defective speech act is highly successful in Dorigen’s case.

It appears that this study has created at least as many questions as it has sought to answer. While it becomes quite clear that the speech act of promising has played an important role in medieval times and even after, the fact remains that there are many other factors at work which should be looked at: for example, further research into the linguistic development and variation of different commissives, and in particular into the relationship between the emerging promise and other means of undertaking obligations is certainly warranted. Also important are cultural factors such as the role of literature, since the concept of the binding promise is most often encountered within a chivalric context. Last, but not least, the growth of literacy and the increasing importance of written deeds in people’s everyday lives should be considered when investigating oral commitments.

As literacy increased and chivalric ideals and courtly love literature gave way to other genres, the importance of binding promises seems to have decreased. Marlowe’s Faustus needs to shed his own blood to sign and seal his contract with Lucifer; Shakespeare’s Cressida protests when Troilus wants her to promise faithfulness. While making oral commitments, i.e. “giving one’s word” continues to be an accepted practice even today, it is not similarly central as it was in the medieval period.

One avenue for investigating this change would be to study a specific text, which has been modernised several times, and look at how the discourse of promising has developed over centuries – Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* with its numerous translations would provide an ideal source for such an analysis.

In this paper, I have concentrated on literary material. However, the concept of the binding promise has most certainly existed in the “real” world as well; for example,

Leyser (1995: 110–114) discusses clandestine marriages and pre-contracts, giving examples of several court cases. Therefore, court records involving such cases might yield some interesting material for further analyses.

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MED, The Middle English Dictionary online version: <http://www.hti.umich.edu/dict/med/>

OED, The Oxford English Dictionary online version: <http://dictionary.oed.com/>

Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guy_of_Warwick

Expressives and assertives

Hāl, Hail, Hello, Hi

Greetings in English language history

Joachim Grzega

1. Introductory remarks

Salutation terms are an important part of a conversation – they tell the other ‘I feel friendly toward you’, and they are maybe the start of a longer conversation. Using Searle’s (1969) terminology of assertive/representative, commissive, directive, declarative (which equates to the performative function in Austin’s 1962 terminology) and expressive speech acts, the function of salutation phrases is predominantly expressive. However, other speech acts might also be included in greetings at the same time, as we shall see in this chapter. This expressive function, this function of simply showing friendliness, holds true for all epochs; the forms with which this function is fulfilled, however, change over time, as speech acts are, in general, not only culture-specific but also time-specific (cf. Taavitsainen and Jucker 2007: 108). In this chapter, the forms that can be found in English language history will be explained.

How can we find out about the ways people greeted each other in medieval Anglo-Saxon and Early Modern English times? The difficulty of unmasking spoken language in earlier periods has been discussed several times: for Old English there are practically no reflexes of or on spoken language, and the majority of studies on historical pragmatics do not delve into Anglo-Saxon times (cf., e.g., the overviews in Jucker et al. 1999 and Jucker 2000). Among the valuable exceptions are the first historical speech-act verb analysis by Traugott (1991) and the corpus-based speech-act analysis by Kohnen (2000: 184) as well as Kohnen’s (2007) analysis. In this chapter, I shall try to make use of the sources of older stages of the English language in the best possible way.

The sources that I have used to collect the greeting phrases in English language history are the OED, the OEC, the TOE, the MED, the CMEPV, DigiBib59, and the SED.¹ The EDD proved to be least pertinent to our study, since conversational phrases are not encompassed (cf., e.g., the entries *good*, *God*, *hail*). Many historical studies concentrate only on the use of address terms, and generally do not go back to Old

1. For the explanation of abbreviations, full bibliographical data is given in the references section. In all corpus searches, poetry (in verse) was excluded from further analysis, as the style only minimally reflects spoken language.

English times. But there is a valuable study by Stroebe (1911) on greeting terms in Old English, Old High German and Old Norse. While Stroebe had to undertake the ordeal of reading through a lot of Old English literature herself, searches for words and phrases have since been facilitated by the existence of large electronic corpora covering all periods of the English language. Nevertheless, we cannot really judge the prominence of medieval phrases in spoken language, but we can give a qualitative account with some indications of which phrases might have been more frequent and which less.

The central questions are: what greeting phrases are there, where do they come from, and how do they change? In order to collect Old English greeting terms, I used the TOE (item 11.05.02.02.01) and carried out various searches in the OEC (Latin glosses were first searched for “ave/ave, salve/salve; avete/avete, salvete/salvete” and then the entire OEC was searched for the English equivalents, including spelling variants). For Middle English, Early Modern English and Modern English the MED and the OED were searched for the senses “greeting”, “salutation”, “welcome”, “hello” and “how are you”. Apart from the citations given under the entries found, the respective phrases were then searched for in their specific contexts in the CMEPV and the corpus DigiBib59, as only these allow us to verify whether the phrases are indeed used as greetings or whether they are used in other functions (cf. also Taavitsainen and Jucker 2007: 108). Despite this empirical corpus search, my main aim is not to give a token list, but rather some idea of salient processes.

I will first present the individual phrasal types in chronological order (first quotes as given in the OED, MED and according to the corpus results; with abbreviations of sources and indication of dates as is common in the OED, OEC and MED). This way, single diachronic developments can become obvious (lifetime of phrases, formal and functional development of phrases, range of variation). In section 3, I will group the greeting terms according to the motives behind their coinages. Section 4 serves to shed light on the further formal and functional developments of greeting phrases.

2. The chronological development of greeting terms

A chronological list seems important as a basis for noting the recurrence of certain phenomena. I will give citations whenever the dates given in the major dictionaries have to, or might have to, be corrected, whenever I want to illustrate unusual usage or whenever I want to illustrate certain subtypes of a phrase.

- *beo gesund* ‘be-IMP-SG healthy’ (once in *ÆGram*), *syo þu gesund* ‘be-IMP-SG you_{SG} healthy’ (twice in *HyGl*), *beoð gesund* [sic!, the usually expected form is *gesundē*] ‘be-IMP-PL healthy’ (once in *ÆGram*), *beoð ge gesunde* ‘be-IMP-PL you_{PL} healthy’ (once in *ÆLS*) – Comment: As can be seen from the number of hits, the word *gesund* is rare in greetings and in general speech even in Old English; in Middle English it becomes even rarer in greeting terms, but more frequent as a

general adjective in the senses of ‘safe, unharmed, healthy, strong, well, undamaged, unbroken, wholesome, sensible’ (cf. OEC, MED s.v. *sound*, OED s.v. *sound*). The last use of *gesund* in greetings can be found in the form of *sound* around 1380. Further, it is interesting to note that in Old English texts constructions with *hāl* and *gesund* occasionally occur in pairs, e.g. in (1), which glosses the Latin *Ave colenda trinitas ave...* (HyGl 3 fol C18.3).

- (1) syo þu gesund to wurðigenne þrynnys
 be-SBJV-SG thou healthy to dignified trinity
 ‘be thou healthy, dignified trinity...
 hal wes ðu...
 healthy be-IMP-SG thou...
 ... be thou healthy...’

- (2) beo hal & gesund (LS 30 B3.3.30)
 be-IMP-SG healthy and healthy
 ‘Be healthy and healthy.’

- *hal sy þu* (6x HyGl), *hal westu* (once in LS, once in HomS, once in HomM), *beoþ hale* (once in MtGl), *hal wes þu* (three times in HyGl, once in MCharm, once in LS, once in ApT, once in Mt (WSCp), once in Mk (WSCp), once in HomS, once in Lk (WSCp)), *wes hal* (once in HomS 24.1, once in HomS 24.2), *sy ðu hal* (once in ÆCHom), *wes þu hal* (once in JnGl, twice in HomS, three times in HomU) – Comment: The only Middle English daughter forms of OE *hāl* can be found in the following 1225 OED quotation, where it occurs as an interjection.

- (3) Hoal ði godnesse!
 hail thy deity
 ‘Hail to thy deity!’

and six times in Layamon’s *Brut* (MED s.v. *hōl(e)*, OED s.v. *whole, hail*), where it occurs as an adjective. In one passage Layamon (*Brut* Clg A.9) uses *hal* in combination with the Scandinavian *hail* (cf. below), if it is not a scribal error.

- (4) Hail seo þu Gurgmund; hal seo þu heðene king. /...
 Hail be-SBJV-SG thou Gurgmund; healthy be-IMP-SG thou heathen king
 ‘Healthy may you be, Gurgmund; healthy may you be, heathen king /...
 ... king / heil seo þi duJeðe; hail þine drihtliche men”
 king hail be-SBJV thy people hail thy following men
 ‘... / healthy may thy people be / healthy may thy following be’

The OEC edits the following use of *wes þu hal* as a question (HomS 18), but *wes* is probably the imperative here, because the second singular form is normally *west*.

- (5) ... he eode to **ðam** **hælende**
 he went to the-ACC-M savior-ACC
 ‘... he went to the savior...
 and cwæð wes þu hal lareow?
 and say-PRET-3-SG be-IMP-SG thou healthy master
 and said: Be healthy, Master.’

- ?*wel gesund* – Comment: The TOE (item 11.05.02.02.01) also lists the form *wel gesund*, although, according to the OEC, it does not occur in direct speech.
- *ic grete þe* (1x ÆHom, 1x ApT, 1x LS, 1x ChrodR) or, more frequently, with the Agent-Author in the third person, until around 1300, then again from 1424 until the sixteenth century (MED s.v. *greten*, OED s.v. *greet*) – Comment: This phrase seems to be quite formal, as it is exclusively used at the beginning of letters and charters (136 times in the OEC), in the vast majority of cases with the adverb *freondlice* ‘in a friendly way’, e.g. (cf. also Finkenstaedt 1963: 38f).

- (6) *Ælfric gret eadmodlice Æðelwerd and ic secge...*
Ælfric greets happily Æðelwerd and I say
 ‘Ælfric happily greets Æðelwerd and I say...’

- (7) *Æþelric biscop gret Æþelmær freondlice. And ic cyþe...*
Æþelric bishop greets Æþelmær friendly-ADV and I tell
 ‘Bishop Æþelric greets Æþelmær in a friendly manner. And I tell you...’

William the Conqueror uses the following formulation (cf. Finkenstaedt 1963: 53).

- (8) *Willelm kyng gret Willelm bisceop... freondlice.*
William king greets William bishop... friendly-ADV
 ‘King William greets Bishop William in a friendly manner...’
 ... And ic cyðe eow...
 and I tell you...
 And I tell you...’

The use of *greet* for a salutation with the agent in the third person (and/or the dative, or beneficiary, in the third person) continues until the fourteenth century at least, and the use with the agent in the first person until the sixteenth century at least, with a strange gap of attestations between 1300 and 1424 (cf. MED s.v. *greten* and CMEPV²): whether this gap is accidental or whether there was an independent (re-)invention of the phrase in 1424 is debatable. After the sixteenth century, the phrase is practically absent; the DigiBib59 only reveals one record, namely the beginning of Emerson’s address *The American Scholar* (1837).

2. It might indeed be the case that the use of a performative was introduced in the first quarter of the fifteenth century independently of the use before 1300.

(9) Mr. President and Gentlemen: I greet you on the re-commencement of our literary year.

- ?*la* (1x OccGl) – Comment: The composite form *eala* is used to introduce a “vocative” and should thus not be considered a greeting term; in Latin-Old English glosses it serves to translate *o!*. ME *lō**, the assumed later daughter form of OE *lā*, seems to have a slightly changed function. In the MED *lo* is defined as an “interjection to attract attention: ah, see, behold, look” (1121 – late fifteenth century). We will see in section 3 how this has to be accounted for.
- *wilcuman la* (twice, in GDPref and 4) is first attested in the ninth/tenth century and then well attested – without *la* – throughout the entire ME period and thereafter (cf. MED, CMEPV, OED).
- *ge sind wilcuman* (once, in Sat) is first attested in the tenth century and then well attested throughout the entire ME period and thereafter (cf. MED s.v. *welcom(e)*, CMEPV, OED s.v. *welcome*).
- ?*welga* – Comment: The TOE also gives the word *welga* as a greeting term; Terasawa (s.v. *good-bye*) gives *welgā* (with a long *a*) as a leave-taking term. But the two records of *welga* in the OEC support neither of these interpretations. In CorpGl2 we find *welga* as a gloss for the Latin *heia* (which is defined in Georges as an expression of astonishment and an expression of request). In PsGLB we find *welga welga* as a gloss for the Latin *euge euge* (which is defined in Georges as some sort of commendation).³ *Welga* is therefore excluded from the rest of the discussion.
- *Hail* and *Hail ðu* are both first attested around 1200 (MED s.v. *heil*, OED s.v. *Hail*), and *al-heil* is well attested since a1393 (MED, CMEPV) – Comment: The OED labels today’s use of *Hail* as poetic and rhetorical and “usually implying respectful or reverential salutation” (“cf. ON. *heill*, and OE. *hāl* similarly used”). The EDD lists *Hail* in the sense of ‘cry used to drive away geese’ in northern Yorkshire; elsewhere the word seems to be absent. (*Heil* is also known as a greeting in OHG and in some regional dialects of Austria).
- *Gretung!* attested once in 1225 (OED s.v. *greeting*, MED s.v. *gretung*).
- *Ave* attested in biblical contexts from 1250 to 1450 (MED), not only in connection with Romans, as the following quotation shows.

(10) Gabriel hire grette and saide hire “aue!”
 Gabriel her greeted and said her ave
 ‘Gabriel greeted her and said to her: “Ave.”’

- *Hu mid þe?*, literally: ‘how with thee?’, attested only once in Layamon’s *Brut* (a1275/?a1200) (MED s.v. *mid*, CMEPV).

3. OE *wilcymo* is also found once for Lat. *euge*. But, apart from this, it is clearly used as a greeting term. As to the etymology, Terasawa is probably right in analyzing the term as a composite form of *wel* ‘well’ and *gā* ‘go’. It can be added that *gā* may represent either the imperative or a phonetically reduced form of the preterite participle.

- *Hu beoð þine beouste?*, literally: ‘how is thy life-condition?’, attested once in Layamon’s *Brut* (a1275/?a1200) (MED s.v. *biwist*) – in the CMEPV edited as “... beo[r]ste”
- Comment: This phrase follows the just quoted hapax legomenon *hu mid þe?* (MED); the exact passage reads.

(11) Lauerd, hu mid þe? Hu beoð þine beouste?
 Lord, how with thee How is thy life-condition
 ‘Lord, how art thou? How is thy life going?’

- *Benedicite* is a rarely attested pious greeting in Layamon’s *Brut*, as in (12), and in the fourteenth century (MED, CMEPV).

(12) “Lauerd, benedicite, we beoþ icumen biuoren þe”
 Lord benedicite/be-blessed we are come before thee
 ‘Lord, be blessed, we have come in front of you.’

- *How fare you?* is first attested c1300 (MED s.v. *faren*, CMEPV) in *Cursor Mundi* – Comment: The phrase is first used as an explicit question in an implicit greeting (here: version of Göttingen MS. theol. 107, l. 12295ff).

(13) And þus til him gan he say /...
 And this to him began he say
 ‘And so he said to him...’
 ... / “Zeno,” said he, “hu faris þu?” /...
 Zeno said he how go-2sg thou
 ‘... “Zeno”, said he, “how art thou?”...’
 ... / And he said, “wele far I nu.”
 And he said well go-1sg I now
 ‘... And he said, “I am fine”’

Later it was also alternatively used as a pure greeting and attested for the last time as a pure greeting in 1823, in Cooper’s *The Pioneers*.

- (14) “how fare you, worthy John?” said Elizabeth, as she approached him; “you have long been a stranger in the village. You promised me a willow basket, and I have long had a shirt of calico in readiness for you.”

Note that the archaic syntax, still without the *do*-periphrasis, is retained here. All in all, this greeting is not very frequent: there are only four hits in the CMEPV and four hits in the DigiBib59, but there is also the variant *How fares it?* (three times as a direct greeting in DigiBib59), e.g. in Dickens’ *Dealings with the Firm of Dombey and Son* (1846–1848).

- (15) Bunsby, my lad, how fares it?

- *Wel þou be*, literally: ‘Healthy thou be-SBJN’ or *Wel is þe* or *Wel mot yow be*, literally: ‘Healthy must you be’ is well attested from 1325, and especially from the late fourteenth century until 1525 (MED s.v. *wel*).
 - *[X] sendeth greting (to [Y])* attested from c1325/c1300 to c1450 (MED s.v. *senden, greting*, CMEPV, OED s.v. *greeting*) – Comment: The phrase sometimes occurs in combination with *in the Lord* or *in God*.
 - *I send greting/worship (to [Y])* attested since c1450 in the MED (s.v. *greting, senden*) and CMEPV, for the last time in Olaudah Equiano’s autobiography (1789) (DigiBib59).
 - *Peace be with you/thee* is first attested a1325, but only in Bible passage translations; first attested in an “English” dialogue over one century later a1447 (MED s.v. *pes*, CMEPV) – Comment: Shakespeare uses it in *Romeo and Juliet*, Bunyam in *Pilgrim’s Progress* and Byron in *Manfred*; more often, though, it is used as a parting phrase (eleven times in the DigiBib59). Byron even uses it in combination with the third person construction as a form of address.
- (16) Enter the Abbot of St. Maurice. ABBOT: Peace be with Count Manfred! – MANFRED: Thanks, holy father! welcome to these walls...
- *God bless you* or *Blessed be you* first attested a1325 (?a1300) and 1390 respectively (MED s.v. *blesen*) – Comment: The phrase is frequent in neither the CMEPV, nor in general; the last record of it as a greeting phrase comes from Thackeray’s *Pendennis* (1848–1850) (DigiBib59).
- (17) Pen rushed by Blanche, ran up to Laura, and seized her hand, “God bless you!” he said, “I want to speak to you...”
- Comment: *God bless you* has been attested as a leave-taking term since 1740 and can today be heard in the US as an explicit wish or blessing and as an implicit leave-taking term. Some also use the reduced variant of *God bless*.
 - *Good morrow* first attested c1386 in Chaucer’s *Miller’s Tale* (OED s.v. *good-morrow, good*, MED s.v. *god, morn, morning, morwe*) – Comment: The phrase is very frequent in Shakespeare (over 60 hits in DigiBib59) and is used as a greeting (and parting) term until the late nineteenth century (DigiBib59).
 - *God save you* has been attested as a greeting since Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* and for the last time recorded in Synges’ *The Well of the Saints* (1905).
- (18) Molly Byrne comes on right with a water-can, and begins to fill it at the well.
- MARTIN DOUL. God save you, Molly Byrne. – MOLLY BYRNE indifferently. God save you. – MARTIN DOUL. That’s a dark, gloomy day, and the Lord have mercy on us all.
 - Comment: As a parting term it is very sporadically recorded in the period from 1385 to 1905.

- (Have) (a) *good day* is well attested as a greeting since Chaucer’s *Summoner’s Tale* 1395, (MED s.v. *god*) (and as early as 1385 as a designation for ‘salutation upon meeting’) (the OED unfortunately lacks these early records).

(19) O Thomas, freend, good day, Seyde this frere.

– Comment: The phrase is nowadays restricted to certain regional and national varieties: Partridge/Dalzell (2006, s.v. *g’day*) describe it as “iconic” for Australian English. As a leave-taking term the phrase *good day* as well as its “neighbor” phrase *God (give) you good day* are attested since 1205 and 1374 respectively (MED, OED).

- *Good morn* is first attested in 1400 (MED s.v. *god, morn, morning, morwe*, OED s.v. *good*) in *Gawain*.

(20) “God moroun, sir Gawayn,” sayde þat fayr lady
“God morning, Sir Gawain,” said that fair lady.”

- *Gud devon, God-deuen, God-den* and *God gi(ve) god-den*: the first form is attested in 1420, the second in 1575, the third and fourth in Shakespeare, and the type still seems dialectal (OED s.v. *good even*, EDD s.v. *good-den*) – Comment: The phrase is attributed to *good even*; however, it is remarkable that *good even* is only attested for the first time in 1481. The first instance of *Gud devon* dates from 1420 (*Sir Amadas*).

(21) ‘Gud devon, dame,’ seyde he.

The second instance dates from 1575 (*Gamm. Gurton*).

(22) God deuen, my friend Diccon; whether walke ye this pace?

The phrase is attested in Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* (the exact time of the day of this scene – Scene II of Act I – is not clear; Scene I had played at late morning).

(23) ROMEO: God-den, good fellow. – SERVANT: God gi’ god-den. I pray, sir, can you read?

Some more light will be shed on this type in Section 3.

- *How haue Je don þis day?*, literally: ‘How have you/ye done this day?’, attested once (as a question-plus-greeting) a1438 (MED).

(24) Whan the sermown was don, a doctowr... come to hir and seyde, “Margery, how have ye don this day?” (*The Book of Margery Kempe*, l. 2902ff)

- *What chere?*, literally: ‘what face?, what mood?’, attested from 1440 until 1900 (Jack London) according to MED (s.v. *chere*), OED (s.v. *cheer*), and DigiBib59, but the SED [item VIII.2.8.] reveals that it is still used in English dialects today. – Comment: the first record already shows this reduced phrase, while the longer version *What chere make you?* is recorded later and only once, namely in 1530.

The following use in Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* (1593/94) seems to be the first to be interpreted as a pure greeting phrase, as an answer to this question is no longer expected (DigiBib59).

- (25) PETRUCHIO [to Kate]: How fares my Kate? What, sweeting, all amort? / HORTENSIO [to Kate]: Mistress, what cheer? / KATHERINE: Faith, as cold as can be. / PETRUCHIO: Pluck up thy spirits, look cheerfully upon me.

- *Biennu* attested only once a1450 (MED, OED)
- *Good morning* is first attested in 1450 (MED) – Comment: The forms *Good morrow* and *Good morn* continue to be used as well.
- *God give you good even!* is first attested in 1480, but still dialectal (OED s.v. *good, good even, even*) – Comment: There are also the forms *God dig-you-den all*, attested in 1588 in Shakespeare's *Love's Labor's Lost* (OED), *Godgigoden* and *God ye goodden*, attested in 1597 in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (OED), *God ye good den*, attested in 1597 in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (DigiBib59), *Goody-godden*, used in 1651 by Thomas Randolph (OED)
- *Good even* is first attested in 1481 (OED s.v. *good, good even, even*) and is last recorded in 1591 according to the OED, but if *Good den* (cf. below) is a corrupted form of *Good even*, then the form is still attested several times in Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing* (1600) (DigiBib59) and still used dialectally (EDD s.v. *good-den*) – Comment: The OED states that *Good even* can be used for any time after noon (like Sp. *Buenas tardes*, Fr.dial. *Bonsoir*, It.dial. *Buona sera*). This also holds true for the variant *Good den*, as shown by this quote from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (1597) (DigiBib59).

- (26) NURSE. God ye good morrow, gentlemen. – MER. God ye good den, fair gentlewoman. – NURSE. Is it good den? – MER. 'Tis no less, I tell ye, for the bawdy hand of the dial is now upon the prick of noon.

- *How!* is a form that is generally used as a call to attract attention, but in one quotation it could be interpreted as a greeting, namely a1500 in the *Northern Passion* (MED; cf. also OED).

- (27) Than... Iudas kist his mowth & seid, 'How hey.'

- *Well met* is first used as a greeting phrase a1500 in the form *wel imett* according to the MED (s.v. *wel*); in Shakespeare there are 18 recordings (1 with *very*, one with *exceedingly*, five in the phrase *you are (very) well met* (DigiBib59)); used until 1729 according to the OED (s.v. *meet, well-met*), but also listed in König (1755: 337), and the DigiBib59 even includes attestations from Dickens (1812–1870), e.g. in *The Personal History of David Copperfield*.

- (28) "Mas'r Davy!" he said, griping me tight, "it do my art good to see you, sir. Well met, well met!" – "Well met, my dear old friend!" said I.

– Comment: Also with this type, we face the phenomenon that the elliptical form is recorded prior to the longer form.

- *God (give) you good morn/morrow* is attested in 1535 in William Stewart's *The Buik of the Croniclis of Scotland* (DigiBib59).

(29) The Thane of Caldar, Schir, God Jow gude morne!

It is also attested in 1588 in Shakespeare's *Love's Labor's Lost* (DigiBib59).

(30) JAQ.: God give you good morrow, Master Person.

- *How do you?* (later *How do you do?*) first attested in 1563 – Comment: According to the OED (s.v. *how*, *How do ye*, *How do you do*) the last record of *How do you?* is from 1587 and the first of *How do you do?* from 1697 (in Swift's *Political Conversations*). However, *How do you?* can still be found in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (1599/1600) (DigiBib59).

(31) TOUCH.: Good even, good Master What-ye-call't; how do you, sir? You are very well met. God 'ild you for your last company. I am very glad to see you.

Another example can be found in Shakespeare and Fletcher's *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (1634?) (DigiBib59).

(32) [Wooer comes forward.] – WOOER. Pretty soul, How do ye? That's a fine maid! There's a curtsy! – DAUGH. Yours to command i' th' way of honesty.

Moreover, the first OED citation of *How do you do?*, from 1697, is not the earliest one; it can be attested a little earlier in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) (DigiBib59). Looking at the records given by the OED, it seems that *How do you?* is over one century older than *How do you do?* and could thus not be derived from it. But, if we include a search in the DigiBib, the interval is reduced to just 40 years, which makes it more plausible that *How do you do?* is not an independent new coinage but just a syntactic variation that shows the *do*-periphrasis which had started to be used in questions at the end of the fourteenth century and had become widely accepted by that time (Denson 1993: 265). Even in the Shakespearian quotes above (quote 29 and 30), the phrase is no longer used as a real question. In Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) the phrase occurs once as a pure greeting and once as a question in a greeting (DigiBib59).

(33) CHR. Come Neighbour Pliable, how do you do? I am glad you are persuaded to go along with me...

(34) Then said Mr. Great-heart to the little ones, Come my pretty Boys, how do you do? what think you now of going on Pilgrimage? Sir, said the least, I was almost beat out of heart...

Note that quotation (34) includes both an interrogative construction with *do*-periphrasis and a construction with the older interrogative syntax. The formula *How do you*

do? is very frequently attested in DigiBib59, as are phonetically reduced variants such as *How d'ye do?* and *How de do?* in many nineteenth-century works. The reduction of the form does not mean that these are necessarily used in informal situations, as the following quotes from Dickens' *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* (1838/39) and *Bleak House* (1852/53) show.

- (35) "Upon my soul, it's a most delightful thing," said Lord Frederick, pressing forward: "How de do?" – Mrs. Nickleby was too much flurried by these uncommonly kind salutations...
- (36) He was embarrassed when he found my guardian with me, but recovered himself, and said, "How de do, sir?" – "How do you do, sir?" returned my guardian. – "Thank you, sir, I am tolerable," returned Mr. Guppy.

As a true question in a greeting (apart from being used as a pure greeting) the phrase is used well into the twentieth century, e.g. in Eliot's *Mill on the Floss*.

- (37) "Brother, I'm glad to see you, [...] I didn't look for you to-day. How do you do?" – "Oh,... pretty well, Mrs. Moss... pretty well" (DigiBib59),

It is also used in Eliot's *Felix Holt, the Radical*.

- (38) "Mr Christian, sir, how do you do, sir?" – Christian answered with the condescending familiarity of a superior. "Very badly, I can tell you..." (DigiBib59).

On the other hand, *How do you do?* is also used as a copy formula (i.e. a phrase that the addressee simply repeats) as early as 1838/39, as shown by the following quotes from Dickens' works *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* and *Dealings with the Firm of Dombey and Son* (DigiBib59).

- (39) "How do you do?" said one gentleman, laying great stress on the last word of the inquiry. – "How do you do?" said the other gentleman, altering the emphasis, as if to give variety to the salutation.
- (40) "How do you do this morning?" said Mr. Carker the Manager, entering Mr. Dombey's room soon after his arrival one day: with a bundle of papers in his hand. – "How do you do, Carker?" said Mr. Dombey, rising from his chair, and standing with his back to the fire.

Note that in quotation (40) *How do you do?* is not interpreted as a question by the addressee, even though the time adverbial *this morning* was added. The use as a copy formula is nowadays the only use. The reduced form *Howdy!* is first attested in 1575 (OED) and occurs very sparsely in written form, actually only once in the DigiBib59 corpus in O. Henry's *Voice of the City*. *How d'ye?* is first attested in Richardson's *Pamela* (1740). Despite the morphonetic reduction, the phrase can evidently be used in formal contexts, as the following quote from Richardson reveals.

- (41) I ran to him. How d'ye, Pamela, said he, and saluted me, with a little more Formality than I could well bear.

The elliptical *How do?* is first attested in 1886, still labelled as London dialect (OED s.v. *how*).

- *God speed!* is used as a greeting (not as a leave-taking term) by Shakespeare, e.g. in *Richard III* (DigiBib59).

(42)1. CIT.: Neighbors, God speed! – 3. CIT.: Give you good morrow, sir.

- *Good time of day* first attested in 1594 (OED s.v. *good, day*)
- *How goes it?* or *How goes the world?*: the former is first attested in 1598 (OED s.v. *go, how*), the latter first in *Macbeth* (1606?), then there is a true lack of written attestations for the second half of the seventeenth and all of the eighteenth century, while the phrase is well attested as a pure greeting as well as an explicit question with an implicit greeting in the nineteenth century (cf. DigiBib59), e.g. in Dickens' *Dealings with the Firm of Dombey and Son* (1846–1848) (cf. also quotation 15).

- (43) “Bunsby, my lad, how fares it?” – A deep, gruff, husky utterance, which seemed to have no connection with Bunsby, and certainly had not the least effect upon his face, replied, “Aye, aye, shipmet, how goes it!” (DigiBib59),

Another example can be found in Lever's *O'Malley*.

- (44) Monsoon, my hearty, how goes it? – only just arrived, I see. Delighted to meet you out here once more. (OED s.v. *hearty*),

– Comment: As with *How fares it?*, the conservation of the original syntax (no *do* periphrasis!) shows that the phrase can optionally lose its assertive sense. According to the SED, the phrase *How does it go?* is used in Kent as an explicit question with an implicit greeting. Note in quotation (43) that the use of an exclamation mark instead of a question mark after *How goes it* indicates that the status as a question must not have been salient.

- *Your servant* attested in Congreve's *Love for Love* (1695) (DigiBib59).

- (45) “O, Mr. Tattle, your Servant, you are a close Man.”

It is also attested in 1755 (König 1755: 299) and still in nineteenth-century works, such as Dickens' *Great Expectations* (1860–1861) (DigiBib59) (example 46) and Meredith's *Evan Harrington* (example 47).

- (46) “So, I presented Joe to Herbert, who held out his hand, but Joe backed from it, and held on by the bird's-nest. – “Your servant, Sir,” said Joe [...]”

- (47) “Here I am at last, and Beckley's in still! How d'ye do, Lady Roseley? How d' ye do, Sir George. How d'ye do, everybody. Your servant, Squire! We shall beat you. Harry says we shall soon be a hundred a-head of you. Fancy those boys! they

would sleep at Fallowfield last night. How I wish you had made a bet with me, Squire.” – “Well, my lass, it’s not too late,” said the Squire, detaining her hand.

By 1751, *your servant* could even be used as an obviously very informal greeting term, as this quotation from Smollett’s *Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* shows:

(48) “This petit maitre, proud of the employment, went up to the senior, who had something extremely peculiar and significant in his countenance, and saluting him with divers fashionable congés, accosted him in these words: ‘Your servant, you old rascal. I hope I have the honour of seeing you hang’d [...]’” (DigiBib59)

- *How is it with you?* attested in 1755 (König 1755: 299).
- *I am very glad to meet you* attested in 1755 (König 1755: 337).
- *How d’ye doing?* first attested in 1797–1802 (OED s.v. *how do ye, how do you do*).
- *Good evening* first attested in Scott’s *The Antiquary* (1816) and in Cooper’s *Pioneers* (1823) (DigiBib) – Comment: The form *Good even* had already been obsolescent since 1591, unless the dialectal *God-den* is a daughter form of *Good even*.
- *How are you?* first attested in 1837 according to the OED (s.v. *how*), but already reported as current in Austen’s *Emma* (1816).

(49) This had just taken place and with great cordiality, when John Knightley made his appearance, and “How d’ye do, George?” and “John, how are you?” succeeded in the true English style...

– Comment: This first attestation in *Emma* indicates that *How are you?* may no longer have been seen as a question already then, which is undoubtedly the case when Dickens uses it in 1837 (*Pickwick Papers*).

(50) “How are you?” said that good-humoured individual, out of breath with his own anticipations of pleasure. “Beautiful morning, an’t it? Glad to see you up so early. Make haste down, and come out. I’ll wait for you here.”

In Dickens’ *A Christmal Carol* (1843), *Dealings with the Firm of Dombey and Son* (1846–1848) and *Great Expectations* (1860–1861) the phrase *How are you?* is used for the first time as a copy formula (DigiBib59).

(51) “How are you?” said one. “How are you?” returned the other. “Well!” said the first. “Old Scratch has got his own at last, hey?”

(52) “Dombey!” says the Major, putting out both hands, “how are you?” – “Major,” says Mr. Dombey, “how are You!” – “By Jove, Sir,” says the Major, “Joey B. is in such case this morning, Sir,...”

(53) “Joe, how are you, Joe?” – “Pip, how AIR you, Pip?”

This also resembles the SED comment for “so” (31 P.9: Brompton Regis): *How art (thou) getting on? – How art thee?* [in response]. The loss of the question function in *How are*

you? can also be seen when an exclamation mark is used instead of a question mark, as, for instance, in quotation 48 and again in Dickens' *Christmas Carol* (DigiBib59).

(54) Hallo! Whoop! How are you! Merry Christmas!

- *Hallo* is first attested in Dickens' *Barnaby Rudge* (1840) according to the OED, but is actually already used by Dickens in his *Pickwick Papers* (1836–1837) (DigiBib59), as in (55).

(55) A red-headed man was working in the garden; and to him Mr. Pickwick called lustily – “Hallo there!” – The red-headed man raised his body, shaded his eyes with his hand, and stared, long and coolly, at Mr. Pickwick and his companions. – “Hallo there!” repeated Mr. Pickwick. – “Hallo!” was the red-headed man's reply. [N.B.: The last *Hallo* must definitely be interpreted as a greeting, not as an attention-getter.]

(56) “Now,” said Perker, turning round before he entered one of the offices, to see that his companions were close behind him. “In here, my dear sir. Hallo, what do you want?”

– Comment: The use of *Hallo* as a greeting is so frequent in Dickens (32 times in DigiBib59, mostly as an explicit call for attention with an implicit greeting; on other occasions as a pure attention-getter, and on other occasions still, classifiable as a leave-taking term) and also detectable in Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, that the word must have already been very much entrenched in the language by that time. A phonetic variant that is also very frequent in Dickens' works is *Holloa*. Another variant which occurs in Dickens' works, as well as in Thackeray's books, is *Hullo*. The reduced form *H'lo* can also be found, for instance, in Prichard's *Working Bullocks* (OED s.v. *how*).

- *Hi!* first attested as a greeting in 1862 (OED), but in one passage in Dickens' *Bleak House* (1852–1853) *Hi* may already be seen as a greeting, not just as an attention-getter.

(57) Turning towards the door, he now caught sight of us. He was short, cadaverous, and withered; with his head sunk sideways between his shoulders, and the breath issuing in visible smoke from his mouth, as if he were on fire within. His throat, chin, and eyebrows were so frosted with white hairs, and so gnarled with veins and puckered skin, that he looked from his breast upward, like some old root in a fall of snow. – “Hi hi!” said the old man coming to the door. “Have you anything to sell?”

The combination *Hi there* is attested since Crane's *Maggie* (1893) (DigiBib59).

- *Wotcher*, according to the OED, first attested in 1899, but Partridge and Dalzell (2006) quote Albert Chevalier's 1891 '*Wot cher!*' or '*Knocked 'em in the Old Kent Road*'. Whether this is truly a short form of *What cheer?* may be debated.
- *How's tricks?* first attested in 1915 (according to the OED, s.v. *how*, *tricks*, it is originally found in Australian and New Zealand English but it could have been independently coined in other nations) – Comment: The first written instance still could be understood to represent a question, but the comment reveals that it was, even then, a quite normal form of address.

(58) “How's tricks?” I asked finally. It was the way he always addressed me.

The non-standard grammar, or the lack of agreement, indicates that the phrase is not just a pure question.

- *How's things?* first attested in 1926 (OED s.v. *how*) (then also *How's things going?*) – Comment: All OED quotes with *How's things?* appear in informal contexts. The non-standard grammar, or the lack of agreement, is an indication that the phrase is not just a pure question; also, the standard-grammar phrase *How are things?* is first attested in 1939 (OED s.v. *how*). The periphery of the question status is also visible by the use of an exclamation mark instead of a question mark in this 1934 quote (OED s.v. *sock*).

(59) Hey, Morrison, old socks. How's things!

- *How are you going?* is given by Partridge and Dalzell (2006) as Australian slang since 1930.
- *Hiya* first attested in 1940 (OED).
- *Hidey!* ~ *Highdey!* first attested in 1941 in the Dictionary of Australian Slang (OED) (glossed as 'Hail! How are you!').
- *What(s) up?* is given as US slang since the 1990s by Partridge and Dalzell (2006) – Comment: Phonetically reduced forms like *Sup?* are also current today.
- *Hey* used as a greeting is rather recent, as an attention-getter is attested since 1225 (OED) – Comment: Whether the following quote from Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749) can be seen as a greeting may be open to discussion.

(60) and presently afterwards in came Mrs. Honour. “Hey day!” says she, “Mr. Jones, what's the Matter?”

But in quote (27) (from 1500) *Hey* sounds like a greeting.

(27) Than... Iudas kist his mowth & seid, “How hey.”

For the sake of completeness, I add that the SED shows two relevant entries, namely VIII.2.8. “How are you? [inquiring about health]” and VIII.3.2 “Glad to see you”. Under

SED VIII.2.8. we find the following types of expression (geographical abbreviation according to the SED⁴):

How are things?, How do? (La), How are you?, How are you doing?, How are you feeling?, How are you (or: is thou/thee) fettle? (Cu), How are you (or: am you) getting on?, How are you (or: beest/bist thou) going on? (Nb Cu), How are you keeping? (Nb Du La Y), How is the world using you?, What cheer (are you in)? (Nb Du), What fettle (are you in)? (Nb Cu Y), What how are you? How is thee/thou? (Nb Cu Du), How be? (Gl O), How's things? (Wo), Are you well? (L), How are you wearing? (L), How have you been keeping? (Ess), Are you keeping quite well? (K), How is/are things with you? (Ha), How are you rubbing along? (W), How are you these days? (Ha), How is it going? (Ha), How does it go? (K).

For SED VIII.3.2 ("Glad to see you.") we find the following lexical types:

*Fain to see you, Glad to see you, Pleased (for) to see you, Pleased/Glad you have come, Proud to see you, That's nice to see you, Delighted to see you, Ever so pleased, Glad you came, Glad you're come, Pleased, Glad I am to see you, Glad to see you again, Pleased to meet you again.*⁵

This shows what is actually the very rich variation in starting conversations and suggests that literature of earlier times may be far from capturing the complete picture of salutation phrases that were current in spoken language.

Kohnen (2000: 182–183) analyzed directive performatives with the help of the *Helsinki Corpus*. He observed (1) that the frequency of directive performatives is seven times higher in Old English than in Modern English, (2) that Old English documents, statutes and text-types of a "epistolary" nature (i.e. prefaces, letters or religious instruction) show the highest frequency of directive performatives in Anglo-Saxon times, and (3) that all Old English directive words must have been replaced in Middle English since none reappear in Modern English. While observation (1) can be corroborated for greeting performatives on the basis of our analysis, this is not the case for the other observations. First, it should be added that all but two instances with *greet* are taken from clearly written language situations, namely letters and charters.⁶ Second, it is not the case that the Old English performative verb *gretan* was replaced in Middle English, it just became rarer. As already stated, the performative use of *greet* in the first

4. Namely: Brk Berkshire, Cu Cumberland, Du Durham, Ess Essex, Gl Gloucestershire, Ha Hampshire, K Kent, L Lincolnshire, La Lancashire, Nb Northumberland, O Oxfordshire, Sr Surrey, W Wiltshire, Wo Worcestershire, Y Yorkshire.

5. The intensifiers that were occasionally set before the adjective are: *very, gradely, (down)right, gay(ly), (bonny and) fair, awful, canny, clear, desperate, fairly, mighty, rare, real(ly), terrible, terribly, well, ever so, damn(ed), proper, uncommon, jolly, pretty, real glad, extra, funny, some, something, suffering, (good) tidy, wholly, rum, main, more than, pure, darned, frightful, infernal, main, master, miserable, monstrous, tidy, wonderful.*

6. On the particularities of salutations in letters today (at least in the US) cf. Nilsen (1984).

person singular is recorded up to the sixteenth century and then once in Emerson's *The American Scholar* (1837). Third, the greeting type with a third singular form for the agent may be restricted to Old English and Middle English, but it shows that in earlier times of English language history performative verbs, in Austin's (1962) sense (i.e. verbs that by saying the action are the action), could also occur in the third person, i.e. not only in the first person as students of linguistics normally encounter – something which Kohnen did not mention.

Stroebe (1911) analyzed *Beowulf*, a few other originally Anglo-Saxon works and Latin-English translation literature. She summarized the common greeting terms in Old English which must have been *wes hal* (with several syntactic variants) and later also *wilcuman* or *þu art wilcuma* (Stroebe 1911: 16), even in translation literature. Indeed, *wes hal* is a comparatively frequent phrase according to our OEC hits (cf. above), while *wilcuma(n)* is rather rare; in written language, however, *X gret Y* is by far the most frequent salutation phrase Stroebe also added that the Anglo-Saxon literature does not tell us anything about handshakes, but that kissing (in various forms) and embracing seem to have been widely known. Finally, she noted that Christian greetings such as *Deo gratias* or a corresponding loan translation don't seem to have been used in Anglo-Saxon times (at least not frequently). Our findings show, however, that "Christian" greetings emerged between the fourteenth and the sixteenth centuries, with the last one becoming obsolescent in the early twentieth century. From passages in literary works we can assume that the social positions of the interlocutors determined the choice of verbal and non-verbal forms (cf. Stroebe 1911: 16). And it seems that only the non-verbal forms built up a rich, situation-dependent variation, whereas the selection of verbal forms was very limited. This lack of verbal variation is paralleled by the findings for the development of leave-taking phrases (cf. Grzega 2005). While the greeting phrases are comparatively limited, Anglo-Saxons immediately asked for and gave name, origin, kin (and merits) (cf. Stroebe 1911: 16). This reminds us of the status-oriented Asian peoples; it is a typical feature of communicative-cultural styles labelled "high context" by Hall (1976) and "collectivistic" by Hofstede (2000). In the course of English language history we can say that the Old English way of starting a conversation by expressing a wish for good health was replaced in Middle English by an inquiry about health and wishes for a good time (of the day). Already at this point we note two recurrent phenomena:

- a. Several greetings start as an explicit question or wish with an implicit greeting. Then they become a pure greeting. Sometimes this results in complementary formulae becoming copy formulae.
- b. Once it has become a greeting (with or without including other functions), a phrase can become morphonetically reduced or it can become resistant to syntactic changes.
- c. Sometimes a longer, more complete phrase is recorded later than a shorter, clipped phrase.

3. Iconemes and etymologies: Where do greetings come from?

By “iconeme” I mean ‘the motivation behind a term, the image behind the coinage of a term’ (cf. Grzega 2004a: 29). Determining recurrent iconemes behind the various etymologically safe phrases will help us elucidate phrases of unclear or debatable origin and development. These phrases of unclear or debatable origin and development are (in alphabetical order):

- *Gud devon/Good-den*
- *Hallo*
- *Hidey*
- *Hiya*
- *How!*
- OE *lā*, ME *lā**
- *Wilcuman la*
- *Wotcher*

I will now present the various iconemes and refer back to the items on this list when relevant.

3.1 Expressive phrases, attention-getters

A number of comparatively young phrases (i.e. from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) are of expressive origin (some would also say onomatopoeic⁷) and developed metonymically from attention-getters:

- *Hi*
- *Hey*
- *Hiya* – Comment: According to the OED “App. shortened from *how are you?* and influenced by *HI*”, but it seems even more plausible to consider it a short form of *Hi you*.
- *Hidey* ~ *Highdey* – Comment: Its etymology is explained by the OED as a (maybe folk-etymological, maybe conscious) blend of *hi* and *howdey*, but it could also be considered purely expressive.
- *How!* – Comment: The MED traces this word back to Old French *hou*; but this is only used as an expression for stopping someone (Greimas s.v. *ho*), which does not deny, of course, that the greeting may be metonymically derived from that (this would then be the reverse development that we saw in ME *lo*). But *How!* can be

7. For the distinction between “onomatopoeic” and “expressive” cf. Grzega (2004b: 153).

equally a reduced form of *How* (*do you do...*)? or, as also suggested by the OED⁸, an expressive phrase.

- *Hallo* – Comment: The suggested etymology in the OED is: “A later form of HOLLO (*hollow, holloa*), q.v. Cf. Ger. *hallo, halloh*, also OHG. *halâ, holâ*, emphatic imper. of *halôn, holôn* to fetch, used esp. in hailing a ferryman. Also written *hullo(a, hillo(a, hello*, from obscurity of the first syllable.” This explanation for the German cognate *hallo* is also found in Schwentner (1924), Kluge and Seebold, Pfeifer, and the DW. As to the German interjections, MHG *holâ*, EModHG *hallo* (fifteenth century) and EModHG *holla* (around 1500) are analyzed by Pfeifer (s.v. *Hallo*) as the imperative *hol-* plus a sound-strengthening particle *-â/-ô*. But here, too, the interjection need not be regarded as a derivation from OHG *halôn* ~ ModHG *holen*, but both the interjection and the verb can be seen as doublets going back to an expressive root. In the OED entry *hollo*, which the OED relates to *hallo*, the reader is in turn referred to the word *holla*. The form *holla* is finally traced back to OFr. *holâ*. This view of *hallo* as a variant of *hollo* is also shared by the ODEE and Terasawa. Only Klein proposes a different view. He regards *hollo* as “imitative”. I share his view since the concept denoted is one which – as we have seen – can easily trigger off expressive phrases, independently, in different languages and at different times. And it may be that expressive phrases influence each other. Thus it also seems possible that the daughter forms of OE *lā*, ME *lā̄** (cf. next item) influenced the formation of *hallo* or are actually the basis for it with an expressive element in first position (after all the stress is on the second syllable).
- OE *lā*, ME *lā̄** – Comment: The OED states (s.v. *lo*):

The evidence of rimes in ME. poetry shows that the spelling *lo* or *loo* represents two distinct words. (1) ME. *lā̄**.—OE. *lā*, an exclamation indicating surprise, grief, or joy, and also used (like O!) with vocatives. (2) ME *lo* with close *ō*, prob. a shortened form of *lōke* (OE. *lōca*), imperative of LOOK *v.*; cf. ME. and mod. dial. *ta* for *take*, *ma* for *make*, also the mod. dial. *loo'thee* = ‘look you.’ [...]. The present pronunciation (əʊ) would normally represent OE. *lā*, but it may be a mere interpretation of the spelling, as the mod. *lo* corresponds functionally to the second of the two words, which should normally have become **loo* (lu:) in mod. Eng.

However, is spelling pronunciation likely in such a word, so typical of spoken rather than of written language? I suggest that a word can easily shift between the concepts (or functions) of “greeting” and “attention getter” – as is still the case with *Hey!* and, after all, also *Hello!* or *How!*

8. However, the OED, which does not actually list *How* in the sense of a greeting, gives this modifier: “it is probable that the different uses are independent in origin, and properly different words”.

It is striking that these expressions nearly all start with [h-]. Is this maybe due to an influence from *Häl!* and phrases such as *How do you do?* etc. (cf. below sections 3.6 and 3.7)?

3.2 Phrases with a performative verb

- *ic grete þe* (or in the third person *X gret Y*)
- *[X] sendeth greting (to [Y])*
- *I send greting/worship (to [Y])*

According to the OED, (s.v. *greet*) the “ultimate sense [of *greet*] is uncertain; the senses of early occurrence in continental Teut[onic] are ‘to approach’, ‘to call upon’, ‘to provoke or compel to action’, ‘to attack’, ‘to irritate, annoy’, ‘to address, salute’”. So the sense of saluting was already evident in Germanic. It is interesting, though, to note that most senses imply approaching with negative intention, while saluting normally has positive associations. The core sense may have been ‘call upon (to get attention)’, like several other phrases which also started as attention-getters, as described in the preceding entry. In Searle’s (1969) speech-act terminology we could say that this phrase combines the declarative and the expressive function.

3.3 Wish for a good time of the day

This iconeme does not seem present before Middle English times. But since then there have been nearly all combinations of the adjective *good* plus a time of the day (*morrow*, *morn*, *morning*, *afternoon*, *even*, *evening*). However, in contrast to many other languages, the phrase *Good day* has become very rare—except for some varieties (e.g. Australian English). A current phrase in late Middle and Early Modern English for any time of the day from noon onwards is *Good even*. Phonetically, forms like *G’day*, *Gid-day*, *Mornin’* and the like show that the explicit wish with an implicit greeting (where the still more complete form *Have a good day/morn(ing)/even* occurs) has gradually also been accepted as a pure greeting, where the connotation of a wish is no longer compulsory.

Specific light should be shed on the type ME *Gud devon* ~ ME *God deuen* ~ EModE *Good-den*. Can this go back to *Good-even*, although this is only attested – as we have seen – about sixty years after *Gud devon*, namely in 1481? The earlier quotation (26), from Shakespeare, would speak rather in favor of this:

- (26) NURSE. God ye good morrow, gentlemen. – MER. God ye good den, fair gentlewoman. – NURSE. Is it good den? – MER. ’Tis no less, I tell ye, for the bawdy hand of the dial is now upon the prick of noon.

But we may also ask whether there is any relation to ME *deuen* ‘[of dawn or daylight]: to come with refreshing dew, bring relief’ (MED). A connection with *den* ‘a place of retreat or abode (likened to the lair of a beast); a secret lurking place of thieves or the

like' (OED) seems folk-etymological, at best. At this point some more Shakespearean expressions are interesting: *God dig-you-den all*, *Godgigoden*, and *God ye gooden* (later also *Goody-godden*, in 1651). These forms must then go back to *God give you good even*, which leads us to the next iconeme.

3.4 Wish for God's protection

- *God bless you*
- *God save you*
- *God speed*
- *God give you good morrow/morn/even*

These four types of wishes for God's protection were coined between the fourteenth and the late sixteenth centuries. Already not too frequent at that time (except for *God bless you*), they have by now fallen completely into desuetude as greeting terms. (On God as an iconemic element for leave-taking terms cf. Grzega 2005).

3.5 Wish for peace

- *Peace be with you/thee*

Like in other European cultures and unlike in Arabic and Asian cultures, wishes for peace are practically absent from greetings in English language history (cf. Grzega 2006: 245).

3.6 Wish for well-being

- combinations of "to be" and OE *gesund* 'healthy, well'
- combinations of "to be" and OE *hāl* 'healthy, well' – N.B.: As a greeting term *hāl* (ModE *whole*) was later replaced by its Scandinavian cognate *hail* (cf. below 1.3.9).
- combinations of "to be" and ME *wel*

This is the most prominent iconeme in Old English, while in Middle English it is widely and rapidly "replaced" by an inquiry about well-being (cf. 3.6) and the wish for a good time of the day (cf. 3.3).

3.7 Inquiry about well-being

Asking someone about their well-being shows that the expressive function of greeting phrases sometimes emanates from information questions. There has been a considerable

number of such original information questions. Some occur only once or very rarely. The more prominent ones are the following:

- *What chere with you? What cheer make you?*
- *How goes it?*
- *How are you?*
- *How do you? How do? How do you do?* – Comment: The form *Howdy*, in my view, can not only be interpreted as a phonetic reduction after the intermediate stages *How-do-ye*, *How-d'ye*, but also as a clipped *How d(o you)* with the diminutive suffix *-y*.
- *Wotcher?* – Comment: The OED explains this as a colloquial corruption of *what cheer?*, but tracing the phrase back to *what (do) you (do)?* might also be a possibility since *how* and *what* both occur in similar greeting formulae, as shown by the SED forms *How are you fettle?* ~ *What fettle are you?* or the blended *What how are you?*. At any rate, the phrase seems to have originally been a complementary formula and an explicit question (as indicated by the question mark in the literature).

3.8 Sign of subversiveness

Apart from information questions there are also two rare cases where the expressive speech act of greeting goes back to some type of commissive speech act (i.e. an offer):

- *Your servant.*

This type of iconeme served for the coinage of a greeting term in the late seventeenth century, i.e. before democracy had yet become an integral part of the British worldview. The same iconeme can be found in the southern German and Austrian greetings *Servus* < Lat. *servus* 'servant' and (old-fashioned) *G'schamster Diener* < G. *Gehorsamster Diener* 'obedient servant'. The origin of *Servus* is generally not transparent to German-speaking people.

3.9 Happy about seeing each other

Finally, phrases that say that the speaker is happy to see the other person can be seen as going back to assertive speech acts, e.g.:

- *Nice to meet you.*
- *(You are) well met.*
- OE *wilcuman (la)* ~ ModE *welcome* – Comment: The later change of the vowel to *-e-* (first attested around 1150) is explained by the OED as a consequence of the influence of *well* under the influence of ON *velkominn* or, albeit chronologically less likely, of OFr. *bien venu* ~ *bien veigniez*. However, I have already argued elsewhere (Grzega 2000) that an additional cause might have been that the vowel in the first

syllable mistakenly shared the development of OE *y* > ME *i-ü-e[!]* (with the three isoglosses coalescing in the London area). This is corroborated by the fact that we actually do find a variation of the forms *wilcome/wylcome~wulcome/wolcome~welcome*. The interesting question, though, takes us back to the etymology of the word. The formal process is still somewhat unclear. Most dictionaries depart from a Germanic form **wel-ja-kwumōn* and, indeed, the OE and the OHG word only occur as adjectival or nominal forms; there is no OE *wilcuman* or OHG *willechoman*, only a secondarily derived weak verb OE *wilcumian*. The agent noun OE *wilcuma* seems to be formally paralleled by OE *wilboda* ‘welcome messenger’, *wildæg* ‘welcome day’ and *wildæd* ‘acceptable deed, favor’, for instance (cf. BoTo). The original iconeme/meaning is something like “coming wanted; wish-coming; wish-come”. This is also present in the German *willkommen* (so the phrase is probably West Germanic). How does a term meaning ‘coming wanted; wish-coming; wish-come’ become a greeting term? Are there any parallel cases? The answer to these questions must lie in an intermediate stage. In AntGl (cf. OEC) *wilcume* is found as a rendition of the Latin *euax*, which in Georges is described as an expression of joy. Moreover, the form *wylcome* is found once for Lat. *euge*, an expression of commendation. So this semantic-iconemic link can be paralleled by a modern phrase such as *Hey!* or *That’s nice!* uttered upon seeing something that brings joy and happiness, then also upon seeing someone you like, which can then easily be turned into a phrase of greeting in general. This is paralleled by one of the lexical types that the SED lists for *Glad to see you*, namely *Glad you came ~ Glad you’re come*.

3.10 Loan expressions

- *Ave* < Latin – Comment: This word, though, is restricted to biblical contexts.
- *Heil* < Old Norse – Comment: ME *heil* cannot go back to OE *hāl*, but must be of different origin, most probably of Scandinavian descent (ON. *heill*) due to the exchange between Anglo-Saxons and the Vikings from the eighth to the eleventh centuries.
- *Bienvenu* < French – Comment: This form occurs only once in the literature.

It is remarkable that with parting terms, loan words occur more often (cf. Grzegza 2005).

4. Formal and functional developments: Where do greetings go?

4.1 Functional changes

Just as Arnovick (1999: 95) has observed a development whereby phrases that represent explicit blessings and implicit partings turned into pure partings, we can now observe explicit questions and implicit salutations turning into pure salutation terms. Illocutionary and semantic “losses” go hand in hand with pragmatic “gains”

(cf. Arnovick 1999: 4). We can generally observe many instances where the original core meaning of a phrase (an inquiry or a wish) gives way to the function of a plain greeting, so that the original speech act might no longer be evidently comprehended in the phrase at all. However, in many instances the two functions “expressive” and “assertive” co-exist and it is then the addressee’s decision whether s/he wants to hear a true information question or just a greeting, e.g. *How are you?* in present-day American English, as shown earlier in quotation (51), from Dickens.

- (51) “How are you?” said one. “How are you?” returned the other. “Well!” said the first. “Old Scratch has got his own at last, hey?”

Sometimes the loss of the question function can be assumed from the substitution of the question mark by a period or an exclamation mark. This semantic and functional deprivation may be called “pragmaticalization” or “discursization” or “discursive inflation”⁹.

4.2 Discursive changes

Another sign that the assertive function of an interrogative has become secondary or peripheral is when the greeting phrase can be replied to with the same greeting phrase, in other words: when the complementary formula has become a copy formula. In the case of *How are you?* this happened quite rapidly; the first record of *How are you?* as a question-plus-greeting dates back to 1816; its first use as a copy formula is already attested in 1843. In the case of *How do you?* / *How do you do?*, which is first recorded as a question-plus-greeting in 1563, the copy mechanism does not occur in the literature before 1838. So the possibility of using *How do you do?* and *How are you?* in copy formulae arose roughly at the same time. *What cheer?*, it seems, has not commonly become a copy phrase. Complementary use and copy use sometimes coexist, as shown by the quotations (36) and (51):

- (36) He was embarrassed when he found my guardian with me, but recovered himself, and said, “How de do, sir?” – “How do you do, sir?” returned my guardian. – “Thank you, sir, I am tolerable,” returned Mr. Guppy.
- (51) “How are you?” said one. “How are you?” returned the other. “Well!” said the first. “Old Scratch has got his own at last, hey?”

9. This sort of “pragmaticalization” (a term coined by Aijmer 1997: 2), or “discursization” (a term suggested by Arnovick 1999: 96 to denote a raise in an already existing discourse function) or “discursive inflation” (another term by Arnovick 1999: 2) is also demonstrated for leave-taking terms by Arnovick (1999) – however, I do not agree with the exact formal and functional history of *Good-bye* presented there (cf. Grzega 2005).

4.3 Morphonetic changes

The semantic and functional deprivation is sometimes accompanied by formal deprivation. The forms become morphonetically reduced (e.g. *How d'ye do?*, *Wotcher!* < *What cheer make you?*, *Hiya!* < *Hi you!*, *How do?*, *Welcome!* < *You are welcome!*) or clipped and supplemented by new suffixes (e.g. *Howdy!*); some forms may have emerged by way of blending or folk-etymology (e.g. *Hidey!* > *Hi!* × *Howdy!*, *What how are you!*).¹⁰ “Normal” and “abnormal” forms often co-exist, as already shown in quotation (36), from Dickens.

- (36) He was embarrassed when he found my guardian with me, but recovered himself, and said, “How de do, sir?” – “How do you do, sir?” returned my guardian. – “Thank you, sir, I am tolerable,” returned Mr. Guppy.

If the Shakespearean expressions *God dig-you-den all*, *Godgigoden*, and *God ye gooden* (later, in 1651, also *Goody-godden*) really do go back to *God give you good even*, it shows perfectly how easily greeting forms can become opaque through a slurred pronunciation (cf. the similar remark in Arnovick 1999: 103). It also shows that the explicit wish with an implicit greeting (where the still more complete form *Have a good day/morn(ing)/even* occurs) has gradually been accepted as a pure greeting, where the connotation of a wish is no longer present.

4.4 Morphosyntactic changes and anomalies

“Grammatically non-standard” structures also abound, which shows that at least part of the morphemes have become semantically deviant.

- *How d'ye doing?*
- *How's things/tricks?* (*how's* is seen as a fixed item, comparable to the wide-spread use of *there's* with plural nouns. According to the OED, the originally AmE phrase *How's tricks?* is even more frequent than *How are tricks?*)
- *What how are you?*

Also of note: In the West Midland and Southern counties of England, there seems to be no systematic way of using *thou*, *thee*, *ye*, *you*. This is another reflex that shows that the morphemes of the phrase indicate (at least in part) a marginalization of their original meaning, or function.

Like phonetic deviations, grammatical deviations illustrate that the interrogatives cannot be looked on as prototypical information questions, but rather as expressives. Again, “normal” and “abnormal” forms often co-exist over a certain period.

10. Blends and folk-etymologies are basically the same process, the only difference being that the first is conscious and the latter unconscious (cf. Grzegą 2004a: 284).

4.5 Morphosyntactic conservation

In contrast to section 4.4, grammar can also remain conservative instead of following new developments (e.g. *How fare you?*, *How goes it?*). This also shows that the speech act of information question is not as salient as in other interrogative sentence types.

4.6 Stylistic changes and conservations

While graphic, phonetic and morphosyntactic abnormalities are signs of meaning shifts, they are not necessarily signs of stylistic shifts, as can be seen with *How d'ye do?*, *How de do?* in nineteenth-century works, which can be used in all kinds of settings. Quotation (41) from Richardson showed such a reduced form in a formal context:

- (41) I ran to him. How d'ye, Pamela, said he, and saluted me, with a little more Formality than I could well bear.

Nevertheless, phrases might shift between stylistically marked and stylistically unmarked levels, i.e. (a) originally neutral phrases may become typical of stylistically elevated and sophisticated contexts, e.g. *How do you do?*; (b) neutral forms can become informal – also in connection with morphonetic reductions, e.g. *Hiya!*; (c) neutral forms can become poetic and dialectal, e.g. *Hail!* (d) stylistically marked forms may become neutral, e.g. *Hi!* and *Hallo!* – the first records of the latter (quotation 55, from Dickens) must actually be interpreted as greetings in distant relationships:

- (55) A red-headed man was working in the garden; and to him Mr. Pickwick called lustily – “Hallo there!” – The red-headed man raised his body, shaded his eyes with his hand, and stared, long and coolly, at Mr. Pickwick and his companions. – “Hallo there!” repeated Mr. Pickwick. – “Hallo!” was the red-headed man's reply.

4.7 The need for innovation


From the material at hand it can be guessed that the forces for innovative changes in greetings are mostly the flattery motive (new wishes and inquiries are invented when the old ones have become too normal), the desire for vivid expressions (cf. the forms in the SED) and the avoidance of excessive length (forms are shortened or replaced by shorter lexical types).¹¹

11. On the various forces triggering lexical change cf. Grzegą (2004a, b).

5. Conclusions

How can we sum up and generalize our findings?

1. In Old English, there are very few linguistic forms for greetings, and phrases referring to time seem to be entirely absent. It is interesting to note that there is a special way of opening letters and charters (namely the use of performative verbs), so text-types could determine the style as they do today.¹² With Middle English, there seems to be a greater variety of greeting formulae. Some of these greetings are not really formulae in the sense of being fossilized and entrenched, as can be seen by the many phrases that occur just a few times or even only once.
2. As for the linguistically entrenched formulae, we can observe that the most prominent openers of conversations are (a) attention-getters, (b) wishes for well-being in Old English, (c) wishes for a good time since Middle English times, and (d) inquiries about one's well-being since Middle English times. The coinages for various explicit speech acts with implicit greeting status then become pure greetings. Sometimes this results in complementary formulae becoming copy formulae.
3. Unchanged and changed forms often coexist for a considerable amount of time.
4. Greeting as well as leave-taking phrases are created and changed as they move to and fro between polar forces, which can be illustrated in the following way (cf. also Grzegala 2005: 62):

<p>explicit wish or question assertive formally “complete”, transparent desire for vivid expressions, flattery specific in-group markers</p>		<p>simple conversational marker expressive formally “deviant”, opaque avoiding excessive length common conversational signs</p>
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“Methinks you seem more beautiful than ever”

Compliments and gender in the history of English

Irma Taavitsainen and Andreas H. Jucker

1. Introduction

Compliments are contradictory speech acts: they enhance the face of the addressee while they put her in a potentially awkward position. Thus a compliment is at the same time a face-enhancing act (FEA) and a face-threatening act (FTA).¹ In response, compliment recipients must either agree to the compliment in some way or other and thereby violate the modesty maxim, or they must disagree and thereby violate the maxim of agreement (see also Pomerantz 1978). The sincerity of speaker illocutions, e.g. whether a routine compliment or a sarcastic comment, may be problematic, and specifications for the right interpretation often accompany the speech act. These mechanisms have been researched in various languages and contrastive studies are frequent.² Compliments are gendered speech acts: according to empirical studies (see below) women give and receive more compliments than men, and the topics are different. From a historical point of view compliments have not received much attention. A notable exception is Beetz (1990, 1999), who has studied compliments in the history of German.

In this paper, we shall take the first steps towards a speech act history of compliments in English by outlining their development from a more general sense to the more specific known as compliments today. We shall discuss the claims made on the basis of Present-day compliments about gender issues, about women being more prone to give and receive compliments and about the topics of compliments being gender-

1. This contradiction can have material consequences, e.g. Holmes (1988: 448) argues that compliments can be FTAs because they describe one of the addressee's possessions as desirable and in some cultures this actually puts an obligation on the addressee to offer the desirable good to the complimenter.

2. They often have a special focus on the acquisition of compliments by non-native speakers (see e.g. Herbert 1986 on compliment acquisition in L1 and Billmyer 1990 on acquisition in L2).

specific.³ We shall investigate whether, and how, predecessors of Present-day compliment can be found in our corpus material from the Early Modern period to the early twentieth century, and we shall assess the contexts of such compliments, including compliment responses. The historical perspective, with an analytic grid of gender, can indicate how conventional the features of gender-specific compliments are. It has also been noticed in recent literature that politeness is not conceived in the same way in all English-speaking cultures in our present-day world; the focus of this article is on past cultures in Britain, which adds an interesting angle to the discussion and which sets social practices in relation to social issues of women's position in past and present cultures. Our second aim is to further the methodology of corpus-aided speech act research. Our "ethnographic" method for studying compliments of the past builds on our earlier studies, especially the insights gained with speech act labels of verbal aggression (see below). Our hypothesis is that speech act labels allow an ethnographic view of how speakers describe, classify and evaluate speech acts. Compliments are particularly intriguing as critical or even negative speaker illocutions may be disguised in seemingly positive utterances.

2. Face-threatening and face-enhancing acts

Every speaker is endowed with positive and negative face, i.e. the wish to be appreciated and liked and the wish to exercise one's own free will and to be unimpeded by others. These face wants have often been criticized as being culture-specific. We do not take a strong view on this issue, but we see it as highly likely that different cultures differ greatly in the relative weight that they give to positive and to negative face wants. Our use of these categories in our analyses does not imply a claim that these notions are universal but – as we hope to show – they nevertheless continue to be useful theoretical concepts, not only for Present-day English, but also for earlier stages of English. Furthermore, politeness has already proved a more diversified and dynamic notion than usually recognized (Jucker 2006); we hope to take up some additional issues about the gender-based approach.

Many verbal and non-verbal actions of interlocutors have an impact on the positive and the negative face of both the speaker and the addressee. Speech acts, such as requests and apologies, have long been analyzed as FTAs of the addressee's negative face and the speaker's positive face respectively. In a request, the speaker imposes on the

3. We agree with researchers who see gender as a system of meaning, a way of construing notions of male and female, socially, culturally or politically, with language use maintaining or contesting old meanings and constructing or resisting new ones. According to this view, we perform ideologies like gender in our minutest acts, and strengthen them by virtue of accumulation. Change comes about mostly through small shifts in the way linguistic resources are deployed (Shoemaker 1998: 1; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003: 6, 55).

addressee’s negative face by asking him or her to do something that he or she might otherwise not have done, and in an apology the speaker admits having perpetrated an offence that is serious enough to require such an apology. However, in addition to acts that are inherently face threatening, there are also actions that enhance the face wants of the addressee and perhaps of the speaker herself. Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2005) suggested the term “face-flattering acts” (FFAs) for such speech acts. We think that this is an important theoretical insight, as we will show below, but we propose the term “face-enhancing act”, because of its more neutral connotation. Flattery implies excessive and insincere praise. We want to use the term in a more neutral sense to refer to speech acts that inherently add to the positive or negative face of the addressee or the speaker.

Holmes (1988, 1995) argues that women tend to be linguistically more polite than men and connects this behavior with positive politeness, building up solidarity and friendliness. According to her, gender is a determining factor and compliments are more common among women: women receive more compliments, mostly from other women, so that compliments can be considered indexical of positive politeness and feminine strategies in New Zealand data (Holmes 2006: 97).⁴ In American culture, compliments form an essential part of the norms of women’s behavior; complimenting becomes a heightened verbal activity of American girls at one stage of their development, and it is not only positive politeness but also sarcastic compliments that play an essential part in this process, casting doubt on the overwhelming interpretations of compliments as belonging to positive politeness (Eckert 2003: 386). Tannen (1996: 209–212) investigates an extract of work-place discourse between female office workers, where the complimenting behavior clearly reflects the status and power differences between the interlocutors.

3. Present-day compliments

Compliments have been described as social moves that live in the landscape of evaluation, conveying positive appreciation of some thing or action for which the addressee may be credited; compliments inhabit the positive landscape while criticism and insults occupy the negative scene (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003: 145). This definition is very much in line with our theoretical point of departure of pragmatic space with various dimensions in which we placed insults and verbal aggression (see Jucker

4. Indexing implies that one particular social meaning becomes linguistically signaled and conventionalized; phonological, morphological, syntactic, lexical, or stylistic, even pragmatic features like silence, can be used to this end (see Sunderland 2004: 24-26). Holmes has been criticized for oversimplification, reverting to white middle-class stereotypes and generalizing too widely (Talbot et al. 2003: 138; Mills 2002: 77), and for focusing too much on the positive politeness functions of compliments and overlooking the ironic and sarcastic overtones (Mills 2003: 219-221).

and Taavitsainen 2000 and Chapter 1 in this volume, p. 6). In this paper we focus on face-enhancing acts. Recent research on compliments builds on Holmes' well-established definition:

A compliment is a speech act which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the person addressed, for some 'good' (possession, characteristic, skill etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer. (Holmes 1988: 446, 1995: 117)

Thus, there are three crucial elements that pertain to a modern compliment: the target of the compliment, i.e. a "good" in Holmes' terminology or an "assessable" in the terminology of Golato (2005: 29); a target to whom this good or assessable is attributed (usually the addressee) and a positive evaluation. A typical example would be extract (1), in which Alison pays a compliment to Franca on her beautiful looks.

- (1) Alison had seized hold of Franca's long plait of dark hair and drawn it out from behind the chair. She began to unplait the end of it, moving her own chair closer. Franca watched. "Franca, you are so beautiful, like an Indian." (BNC APM 2696–99)

In some cases, Present-day compliments concern a third person and not the addressee directly, but in such cases, there is always a direct link between the positively evaluated person and the addressee that transfers the positive evaluation to the second person (see below).⁵

We take the above definitions as our point of departure and define compliments as speech acts pointing out pleasant and agreeable things about the addressee or something or someone connected with the addressee. Compliments belong to a group of speech acts of verbal kindness, they are moves of positive evaluation and approval. Their place in the pragmatic space of speech acts is in the same dimension as flattering, praise, admiration, commendation, recommendation, accolade, and words of appreciation. We do not propose a definition which successfully discriminates between these closely related speech acts, but we see compliments as a fuzzy speech act category with overlapping areas, with different speech acts intertwining and merging. Some attempts can be made to distinguish between neighboring speech acts, e.g. praising someone not present is possible, but complimenting requires the presence of the target; praise may become a compliment if a connection exists. Speech acts can be interpreted in various ways by different viewers, showing situational variation according to the context of utterance and the people involved in the act of communication.

5. Holmes (1988: 447) gives the following example in the context of C (the complimenter) visiting an old school friend, R (the recipient of the compliment) and comments on one of the children's manners:

"What a polite child!" – "Thank you. We do our best." The response shows that the utterance is being understood as a compliment, presumably on R's parenting skills.

In the pragmatic space of speech acts, the positive end of the dimension is inhabited by compliments, and the negative end by insults. The distinction between a compliment and an insult can sometimes be difficult to make (see the examples below) because both of them are used to assess the addressee either positively or negatively. Negotiation of meaning is often needed for clarification, and even then it may remain ambiguous. Background assumptions are brought into play in interpreting what certain words and utterances in a particular context mean. Moreover, speaker illocutions may vary from sincere and honest to playful, ironic and sarcastic. Compliments are particularly susceptible to additional implicit meanings.

The difficulties in interpreting compliments have lead Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003: 154) to classify compliments into three different categories: routine, sarcastic and deceptive compliments. Routine compliments are those described in definitions, whereas the sarcastic compliment “does something like mime an apparent compliment in order to mock it”. Sarcastic intent is easy to miss, and sincere hyperbolic compliments are very similar in many respects. Insincere compliments, which form the third type, do not maintain the literally expressed positive evaluation. This is also true of sincere hyperbolic and sarcastic compliments, but the third type can be further characterized by the self-interested want to enhance the complementee’s good opinion not as an end but as a means to some other goal. “Flattering” would be the right label in many cases. The distinctions between the categories are not clear.

Some authors of fiction and drama are known for their skill in the field of ironic and sarcastic compliments, Oscar Wilde (1854–1900) being a case in point. His plays contain witty exchanges of words with sarcastic overtones that reverse the literal meanings in the way described above. The following passages are among the best examples of this kind of language use in English literature.⁶ Examples (2)-(3) contain compliments and sweet words, not to be taken at their face value:

- (2) GWENDOLEN Cecily Cardew? [*Moving to her and shaking hands.*] What a very sweet name! Something tells me that we are going to be great friends. I like you already more than I can say. My first impressions of people are never wrong.
 CECILY How nice of you to like me so much after we have known each other such a comparatively short time. Pray sit down.
 (Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1894), p. 95.)⁷

6. We are grateful to Diana Webster for pointing out the examples (2) and (3) in this section to us. Thus, methodologically, these two examples represent the “philological method” of qualitative reading and expertise in British literature.

7. Note that these and all other quotations of literary works are based on “Literature Online (LION)” (<http://lion.chadwyck.com/>).

The audience catches the shades of meaning, as the patterns are familiar, though the examples come from the late nineteenth century.⁸ For more remote periods, it may be difficult to catch such overtones, but fictional texts have the advantage of including narratorial comments that explicate speaker illocutions or perlocutionary effects for us.

Skilful authors can exploit the resources of language at the level of speech acts as well as at, for example, traditionally acknowledged levels of stylistic lexical and syntactic choices. The following extract from *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), for instance, is an intricate network of speech acts, explicated by metatext. Mr Collins' address to Elizabeth forms a succession of compliments and insults, self-praise and humiliative speech acts. The sequence becomes a character portrait of a pompous hypocrite:

- (3) My dear Miss Elizabeth, **I have the highest opinion in the world of your excellent judgment** in all matters within the scope of your understanding but permit me to say that there must be a wide difference between the established forms of ceremony amongst the laity, and those which regulate the clergy; for give me leave to observe that I consider the clerical office as equal in point of dignity with the highest rank in the kingdom – provided that a proper humility of behaviour is at the same time maintained. You must therefore allow me to follow the dictates of my conscience on this occasion, which leads me to perform what I look on as a point of duty. Pardon me for neglecting to profit by your advice, which on every other subject shall be my constant guide, though in the case before us I consider myself more fitted by education and habitual study to decide on what is right than a young lady like yourself.
(Austen, Jane, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), pp. 225–226.)

Insincere compliments are used as self-interested strategic moves, and they are often difficult to distinguish from routine compliments. In the following passage the influence of compliments is explicated and alternative strategies are weighted:

- (4) At her next visit to Wellwood House, I went so far as to say I was glad to see her looking so well. The effect of this was magical: the words, intended as a mark of civility, **were received as a flattering compliment**; her countenance brightened up, and from that moment she became as gracious and benign as heart could wish – in outward semblance at least; and from what I now saw of her, and what I heard from the children, I knew that in order to gain her cordial friendship, **I had but to utter a word of flattery** at each convenient opportunity; but this was against my principles; and for lack of this, the capricious

8. A more recent example of similar conversations is found in e.g. Alan Aychbourn's play *Absurd Person Singular* (1972). A review of the Play (*CurtainUp* The Internet Theater Magazine of Reviews, Features, Annotated Listings www.curtainup.com) pays attention to "comments on the kitchen with barely veiled sarcasm ... the curtain colors evoke a sly 'most insistent.'" Such remarks are, in fact, insults disguised as compliments. We are grateful to Mark Shackleton for this example.

old dame soon deprived me of her favour again, and I believe did me much secret injury.

(Brontë, Anne, 1820–1849: *Agnes Grey* (1847), p. 69.)

Compliments show a great deal of variation, and have developed various subcategories. Besides the sarcastic and the insincere compliment, other, more minute classifications can be made. Several types are mentioned in a play from 1843, in which the different kinds of compliments are discussed by a polished and well-versed Frenchman, described as “this high-flown hussey” in an aside by another character in the play. The passage itself is ironical and mocks French polite society, the model of English court culture and upper class behavior including social practices like complimenting:

- (5) I am engaged in a work of great research, to be entitled – “On the proper application of the Art and Science of Compliments.” I shall treat of compliments in all their branches, from their first origin; beginning with that paid by the serpent to Eve, in Paradise, and so downwards. To embark in a compliment with due refinement requires the greatest skill, judgment, prudence, forethought, and delicacy of imagination. There are many various kinds of compliments; each demands almost a life-time to study it properly. There is the compliment direct and the compliment indirect; there is the compliment defensive, and, sometimes, the compliment offensive – most beautiful Lady Geraldine –

(Stuart-Wortley, Emmeline, Lady, *Moonshine* (1843), p. 36.)

4. Compliments in the past

Compliments have undergone changes in the history of English, and semantically the scope of the term has narrowed. Historically, the term “compliment” had a much wider application. The *Oxford English Dictionary* definition opens a window to the historical perspective. According to this source a “compliment” is

a ceremonial act or expression as a tribute of courtesy, ‘usually understood to mean less than it declares’ (J.); now, esp. a neatly-turned remark addressed to any one, implying or involving praise; but, also applied to a polite expression of praise or commendation in speaking of a person, or to any act taken as equivalent thereto. (*OED*, “compliment”)

This is in accordance with Old German in which the term “compliment” “is a far more comprehensive term embracing oral, written and even non-verbal interaction rituals

for everyday and ceremonious communication situations” (Beetz 1999: 142).⁹ Speech acts like greetings and farewells, congratulations and condolences, and even requests and thanks, are included in compliments.¹⁰ Beetz extends the term to “all forms of initiating and maintaining contact such as introducing oneself and others, regards, recommendations, invitations, announcements, invitations to dance, good wishes, promises, offers of service, presentations, apologies; even ‘reprimand *compliments*’ are not considered to be a contradiction in terms” (see also Beetz 1990: 14–21, 109–115). The same applies to the semantic history of the English word “compliment”. It is a general term including other speech acts in the early periods. Evidence can be found e.g. in the following uses of the word in English literature (extracts 6 and 7) and early English newspapers (extracts 8 and 9).

- (6) they paid each other the common Compliment of a Good-morrow, and then went to breakfast (Davies, Mary, *The Reformed Coquet*, 1724–25)
- (7) This Girl, notwithstanding her Country-Simplicity, knew a Compliment was expected from her on this Occasion (Lennox, Charlotte, *The Female Quixote*, 1752)
- (8) The 3d Instant the Queen of Spain began to receive the Compliments of Condoleance for the Death of the late King. (ZEN, 1701, lgz0366)
- (9) Cardinal Gabrieli, is by the intercession of the Popes Sister, dispenced with from his journey to his Residency, for which favour he has paid his Compliments, and is now Treating for the Purchase of the Lands of Fiano, belonging to Prince Ludovisio. (ZEN, 1671, lgz0052)

The compliment in (6) consists of a polite and perhaps somewhat formal greeting. In (7) a polite response is designated as a compliment, and the formulation makes it clear that, according to the writer, there is a certain contrast between country simplicity and the formality of a compliment. It is noteworthy if a simple girl from the country knows when a compliment is required.

The use of the term “compliment” in early newspapers likewise highlights the formal and indeed diplomatic aspect of this speech act. In the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, the term “compliment”, as it is used in ZEN, referred exclusively to acts of diplomacy. Compliments were an important part of international politics. Representatives of a state paid appropriate compliments to the dignitaries of another state. Royals, the Pope, or other members of the nobility were often the recipients of

9. The German term *Komplimentierkunst* ‘the art of complimenting’ refers to compliments in this wider sense. In fact, *Komplimentierkunst* may be seen as equivalent to polite and courtly behavior in general, which can be traced back to the Renaissance period (cf. Beetz 1990, 1999).

10. The meaning ‘regards, greetings’ is still current. In our material we have comments like “How are you? Compliments to the young lady...” (Baring-Gould, Sabine, *In the Roar of the Sea* 1892, p. 36.) And in Portuguese, for instance, the cognate verb *cumprimentar* means both ‘to compliment’ and ‘to greet’ (Lachlan Mackenzie p.c.).

compliments. From the examples it can be deduced that these compliments were always an expression of good wishes and good intentions. Particularly frequent were compliments on the coronation of a new king or the accession of a dignitary to a high office. Welcome compliments were also frequent, as were compliments of condolence.

The modern conception that compliments are often not entirely true, and that some doubt is present, is found in some early examples as well.

- (10) Did he like your pronunciation? Yes Sir, but I believe it was but by way of Complement (EEBO: *The True Advancement of the French Tongue*, 1653: 178)

In all, examples of this type are numerous in our material (see below). A quotation from an English etiquette book, *The Academy of Complements* (1650: 320–321) makes the point about the inclusiveness of the term and ties compliments to the norms of the upper classes. It is evident that the speech community sharing the rules for conduct and interpretation displayed in these handbooks was the small elite at the top of the social hierarchy:

Complements are a short collation of Sweetmeats, to banquet and please the daintiest taste; they are the quintessence of wit, the refiners of speech, and fit the mind better then the apparel doth the bopy [sic, for body]: for the cloaths may be too strait, or point device; but complements are the minds free exercise. ...the moral of which is, That Wit and Women are fraile things, gilded hypocrites, specious out-sides; to which Complements, like feathers to small birds, make a proportion, though the body itself be but little. They are multiplying-glasses, and flattering Mirrors, that conceal age and wrinkles ... A complementive Submission, is the Flatterers and Politicians Key to open the most secret Cabinets of Princes breasts with...; The preface to a Complement is the motion of the body; the grace of it, the disposing of the countenance;... Complements are the language of Gallants (the meltings of their language) the musical ravishings of their perswasive tongues, the odours of their perfumed breaths; loving sighs, and the business of their afternoons...

(EEBO: *The Academy of Complements* 1650: 320–321.)

Etiquette books in Early Modern English contain model dialogues giving advice on how to approach people of high rank, the King, the Queen, noblemen, how to initiate polite requests, and how to behave in polite society. These dialogues were probably learned by heart, and model answers are also given.¹¹ Compliments belonged to the social practices of people of high rank. Ways of engaging in those activities had to be taught, and how these social activities became part of polite behavior lower down on the social scale must have been related to increasing literacy and growing prosperity among the middle classes.

11. Letter writing manuals are sometimes included in the same volumes. They give model address formulae and signature lines, but according to recent studies the advice was followed less frequently than earlier expected. Compliments could be learned in the same way from these manuals. Our material shows that a set of conventional compliments existed (see below).

Genres that build on compliments and related speech acts are found in the written form in the history of English, and the speech act of complimenting can be traced in the written culture of past periods from the late medieval period onwards. According to genre theory, new genres of writing are created to meet the cultural needs of discourse communities. In Early Modern culture, metatextual genres like prefaces and epilogues became important as they were addressed to patrons on whose benevolence the authors of the texts had to rely for their source of livelihood. Prefaces are already found in some medieval texts, but they grow in volume and importance in the sixteenth century, and it became customary to address the patron and the readers in separate prefaces. Addresses to the patron build on compliments and humiliating speech acts in classical styles, as defined by *ars dictaminis* as appropriate for addressing people of high rank. In the early material, the rhetorical eloquence of compliments follows the models of the French courtly practices with highly formulaic patterns. Speech act sequences are of interest here. In addition to the compliment phrases with praise and flattery, they contain self-humiliative expressions as part of the formula. Examples of this pattern can be found even earlier in the literature. The genre of complaint poetry is perhaps the outmost development of the tradition with its elaborate address in which face enhancing acts are accompanied by humiliating speech formulae (cf. example (3) above). Chaucer transferred this genre into courtly poetry in English.

- (11) Humblest o herte, highest of reverence,/ Benygne flour, coroune of virtues alle,
 Sheweth unto youre rial excellence/ Your servaunt, yf I durste me so calle...
 (*The Complaint unto Pity*, lines 57–60, *The Riverside Chaucer*).

5. Methodologies of compliment research

In studies on present-day compliments, various pragmatic research methods have been applied and discussed in the literature. Manes and Wolfson (1981: 115) argue that only the ethnographic method is reliable for collecting compliments. By ethnographic method they understand field methods like the diary method or the participant observation method. Together with their students they collected 686 examples of compliments as they occurred in “real situations”, i.e. in everyday interactions (1981: 116). Their claim of capturing authentic language use by this method is valid in so far as participant observation does not distort the behavior of the people under scrutiny (see Kasper 2000: 319). In general, the earlier literature seldom takes the overtones of compliments into account, although sarcastic compliments are common.

The same approach and method of collecting compliments was used by Holmes (1988) to investigate complimenting behavior of speakers in New Zealand. Together with her students, she collected 484 compliments or rather compliment exchanges, because she and her students were careful to also collect the responses that were given

to these compliments. The exact words used in both the compliment itself and the response to it were taken down as soon and as accurately as possible, with relevant contextual details (Holmes 1988: 446). She claims that compliments fulfill very different functions in men’s and women’s speech: “women tend to use compliments as positively affective speech acts whereas men more often perceive them as face-threatening acts” (1988: 449). The topics of compliments are different, as women receive compliments about their appearance while men receive more compliments about their possessions (for details, see Holmes 1988: 455). Holmes’s more recent assessment on gender differences and politeness is based on the same empirical research (1995).

The most comprehensive study on American compliments consists of a corpus of 1,062 compliment events, including both compliments and responses to them (Herbert 1990). The focus of the article is different from Holmes’s study, and more attention is paid to the responses. In general, compliments from men were accepted, while compliments paid by women received varied responses. Twelve different response types are distinguished: appreciation token, acceptance, praise upgrade, comment history, reassignment, return, scale down, question, disagreement, qualification, no acknowledgement and request interpretation (Herbert 1990: 208–209).

In addition to the diary method, discourse completion tasks have been used as the data collecting method. In such a task, informants, usually students at the university of the researcher, are given descriptions of sample situations and they are asked to provide what they perceive to be a natural compliment in the given situation. An example of this method is provided by Chen (1993), who used a discourse completion task to investigate cultural differences in compliment responses between speakers of Chinese and of American English.¹² Respondents had to react to four slots for different responses, in four different situations, with compliments that praised the looks, clothes (a nice sweater), achievements (the performance in a presentation) and possessions (e.g. a Rolex watch) of the addressee. The discourse completion task is a somewhat simpler and more artificial method of data collecting, used mostly for contrastive studies, but to our knowledge it has not been applied to a gender study. If we apply Holmes’s observations on compliment topics and gender to the above situations, looks and clothes would stereotypically be female topics and achievements and possessions male talk. Chen (1993: 51) claims that most compliments paid in daily life are about these four topics. More recently, Schneider and Schneider (2000) have extended this line of research and used the same discourse completion task with speakers of Irish English and of German. This method, although it works for contrastive studies, simplifies real life situations and ignores all more refined nuances (see below).

12. He provides his informants with situations such as the following:

You have given a presentation in your biology class. After the presentation, one of your classmates comes to you and says: “That was a great presentation. I really enjoyed it.” You reply:

A: _____ B: _____ C: _____ D: _____

(Chen 1993: 70)

Language communities are said to react differently to compliments and the use and the status of compliments vary. Larger sequences of turns reveal the attitudes. Speakers of American English or New Zealand English are said to react with thanks or acceptances, while the Japanese are said to reject or downplay compliments (Leech 1983: 136–137; Holmes 1988: 461). In some cultures third turns occur as well, as it is important to upgrade the compliment and stress its sincerity, e.g. by adding “and this is not a compliment” or “and I really mean it” (see Jaworski 1995).¹³ The purpose of compliments is clarified by such a statement: the prime motivation for the compliment is to give a declaration of “truth” (cf. the dictionary definition above), the positive evaluation is claimed to be objective and not only for making the other person feel good.

Compliments have also been considered from the feminist point of view. Patterned conversational moves can coerce people into gendered roles and enforce them. For example, a compliment offered to a woman on her appearance is part of the linguistic practice by which women are judged by their looks, while men are complimented on their actions and judged by their accomplishments (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003: 78). Comments on women’s looks can easily be understood as patronising, and in work situations they can efficiently downplay a woman’s professional contribution.¹⁴

Some languages are claimed to have more routinized compliments, while others are said to be more creative; this may be true of different historical periods of the same language as well. Manes and Wolfson (1981: 115) claim that “one of the most striking features of compliments in American English is their almost total lack of originality”, and Holmes (1988: 452) supports this view: “Compliments are remarkably formulaic speech acts in that a very small number of lexical items and syntactic patterns account for the great majority of them.” Of the 686 compliments collected by Manes and Wolfson and their co-researchers, the pattern that something *is/looks/seems (really) good/beautiful/some other positive adjective*, accounts for more than half of all the compliments, and the three most common patterns account for 85 per cent of all. Thus, according to the earlier literature, Present-day compliments are highly formulaic. According to Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (1989), Polish compliments follow very similar patterns and are equally formulaic. In a recent survey, Holmes (2007: 36–41) summarizes the earlier research results on the narrow range of adjectives and syntactic patterns. In her own corpus, *nice, good, beautiful, lovely* and *wonderful*, were the core

13. Such comments occur in our historical material as well, e.g.

Alph. What a difference your bright cheery presence makes in these dull old chambers!

Bel. Thank you, that’s a very pretty compliment.

Alph. Not at all. I mean it. (Gilbert, W. S. (William Schwenck), *A Medical Man* (1870), pp. 33–34.)

14. An example of the type is a “compliment” to a female colleague in a symposium where she did not read a paper “...you contribute to the atmosphere”. Further down the scale we find harassment in street remarks (Mills 2003: 220).

adjectives, whereas Wolfson’s (1981) American corpus had *nice, good, beautiful, pretty* and *great*. Likewise, the verbs that predominated were few: *like, love, enjoy* and *admire*. Syntactically, women’s compliments were found to be more complex, while men tended to revert to the minimal pattern, e.g. “great shoes!”. (Jucker, Schneider, Taavitsainen and Breustedt, this volume, test the claim about the formulaic nature of compliments and whether it can fruitfully be made use of in corpus linguistic methodology.)

6. Locating compliments in historical materials

Participant observation and discourse completion tasks are beyond the reach of historical pragmaticians, but there are other means of gathering authentic data. For retrieving the empirical material for this study, we relied on electronic corpora and used various methods to collect the examples.

We started our historical study by tracing positive evaluations in corpus materials, including the newly available *A Corpus of English Dialogues 1560–1760* (CED, Kytö and Culpeper 2006). For locating compliments of the modern type, we made corpus searches with various lexical items gleaned from the word list of positive evaluations like the above-mentioned adjectives *beautiful, nice, great, lovely* and lexical strings like *really nice, really great, well done, like/love your, what a, you look/re looking* (see above). It turned out that most searches served to locate passages with amorous talk and courting scenes, which are not included in this study.¹⁵ This exercise was not as fruitful as we had hoped, but it yielded us the best examples of compliments in historical discourse, not labeled as such but exhibiting all their characteristics. The attempts to locate compliments with the above lexical items proved extremely time consuming and labor intensive, as the lexical items are frequent and only few of the occurrences reveal compliments.

A better alternative for corpus searches of compliments for our present survey was to revert to the “ethnographic” method that had proved fruitful in studying insults in a large electronic database (see below), as the results revealed what was considered insulting in the Victorian era. Following the same line of argumentation, we can assume that the method reveals the opposite behavior: what was considered proper and polite, particularly in association with gender (see also Romaine 2003: 104–105).¹⁶ We

15. Some of the examples with the search word *compliment* yielded similar examples, e.g. “‘I hope I have not interrupted you,’ she said, timidly. ‘An agreeable interruption. At any time you have only to show yourself and I will at once come to you, and never ask to be dismissed.’ She knew that this was no empty compliment, that he meant it from the depth of his heart, and was sorry that she could not respond to an affection so deep and so sincere” (Baring-Gould, Sabine, 1834–1924: *In The Roar Of The Sea* (1892), p. 230.).

16. The ethnographic method was also tested in another article on the word *merchant* in historical corpora. The contexts were indicative of the social position, activities, and characteristics of the group of people (Taavitsainen 2006).

decided to focus on the speech act labels *compliment*, *compliments*, *complement*, *complements* (with various spelling forms), to discover what people in past periods labeled as “compliments”. This method seemed particularly relevant for the purpose of this study as the aim of these searches was to locate relevant passages for qualitative assessment. The labels of speech acts are often used to negotiate illocutions and perlocutions, thus revealing the neighboring speech acts. Such passages may or may not contain the actual wordings of compliments and compliment responses.

7. Two examples in their sociohistorical context

Searches with the word *compliment* located passages for us to analyze qualitatively, but it was not easy to interpret the examples in historical materials. For example, Aphra Behn uses the word in example (12) from 1671. The meaning here seems to be connected with the more personal type of compliment, referring to looks, perhaps. The overlap with insults is explicit in this example:

- (12) *Isab.* Well, leave the management of your Affairs to me,
 – What shall we do? here's *Alberto*.
Enter Alberto.
Lor. Well, who can help it; I cannot walk invisible.
Alb. *Lorenzo*, what making Love to *Isabella*?
Lor. She'l serve, my Lord, for want of a better.
Isab. That's but a course Complement.
Lor. 'Twill serve to disguise a truth however.
 (Behn, Aphra, *The Amorous Prince* (1671), p. 10.)

The last line serves to introduce a negotiation of meaning, which would not be needed for the ceremonious compliment, and thus it may be an instance of the modern type, with overtones.

Another seventeenth-century text provides unambiguous examples of the personal type. Example (13) covers a longer passage with the social motivations of establishing solidarity and trust as a preamble to the more serious topic of the text. The passage was located by the evaluative adjective (*more*) *beautiful*; the word *compliment* does not occur in this text. The text is a conversation between two newly married ladies from the year 1696. The passage shows how the issues discussed in the theory section about Present-day compliments apply to the speech acts in the written form composed more than three hundred years ago. The beginning of the dialogue sounds almost like a parody of the modern compliment. The text is anonymous, and thus likely to be written by a female author.¹⁷

17. Women wrote anonymously or with pseudonyms for financial and social reasons.

<p>(13)</p>	<p>Amy. Welcome, my dear <i>Lucy</i>! I have long'd to see you.</p> <p>Lucy. Sweet <i>Amy</i>! I have had no less impatience for your dear Company. Lord! how you're alter'd, methinks you seem more beautiful than ever: A very Angel!</p> <p>Am. Fie, <i>Lucy</i>, do you begin to abuse me thus already?</p> <p>Luc. No, I vow; you appear such in my eye, really.</p> <p>Am. Perhaps my new Mantua adds to my little Beauty: You like the Fashion then? 'Tis the newest Stuff.</p> <p>Luc. As I live, I never saw any thing more pretty; sure 'tis all Spanish Wool.</p> <p>Am. Yes, yes, the Wool is Spanish, but it was Dyed at <i>Venice</i>.</p> <p>Luc. There is no Silk can wear neater –</p> <p>And what a delicate Colour! – For Heaven's sake, from whence had you this Noble Present?</p> <p>Am. From whence, <i>Lucy</i>? From whom should a Vertuous Wife receive it but from her Husband?</p> <p>Luc. Oh happy you, who have such a Husband! wou'd I had Married a Cobler when I met with my Bargain.</p> <p>Am. How now, Friend! do you repent already?</p> <p>Luc. How is it possible I shou'd do otherwise?</p>	<p>Greeting, address with endearment Compliment</p> <p>Greeting in response, address with endearment, compliment Return of compliment (hyperbolic) Mild swearing. Exclamation of positive evaluation, exaggeration</p> <p>Response. Mock disapproval by interpreting the compliment as a mock insult Response, assurance of honesty</p> <p>Attribution of the positive evaluation to a piece of garment. Asking for more praise. Bragging. Compliment, exaggeration. Asking for details.</p> <p>Bragging.</p> <p>Compliment continued. Affective language use. Admiration. Request for more information. Rhetorical counter question Topic shift.</p> <p>Compliment/ envious statement(?)</p> <p>Self-blame, disparaging one's own</p> <p>Response. Surprise, request for more information Counter-question, topic continued</p>
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(Anonymous. *A Dialogue Between Two Young Ladies Lately Married, Concerning Management of Husbands*. London: Printed in the year 1696, pp. 3.1 – 37.8)

The rest of the dialogue turns out to be highly didactic, giving advice to Lucy, the unhappy newly married lady, on how to improve her situation. The text belongs to the

category of didactic handbooks, although it employs mimetic characters.¹⁸ The text is revealing of women's position at the time of writing. The cause of Lucy's unhappiness is revealed little by little. She continues:

Luc. How is it possible I shou'd do otherwise? do you see these Rags, and how I am dizen'd? Thus it goes with my Husband's Wife. Let me dye, if I am not ashamed to appear in Publick, when I perceive how genteel other Women go, whose Husbands are much inferior to mine both for Quality and Estate.

Amy starts to preach in biblical terms, with references to St Peter, for instance, about women's status. The argument goes according to the traditional lines, but between the lines, we can read about the social conditions as well. The identity of a married woman was completely dependent on her husband's status. Women were totally subordinate to men and could not, for example, own property (see Shoemaker 1998):

Am. The true Ornament of Wives does not consist in Apparel, or Dress, as we are taught by St. *Peter*, we, that are Marry'd, ought to esteem our selves fine enough if we please our Husbands only.

Luc. But, in the mean time, my good Man, tho' he be so very penurious to his Wife, is other ways sufficiently profuse in wasting that fair Estate which I brought him.

Lucy's troubles do not end here, the treatise enumerates all possible vices and hardships to be tolerated. Women were under their husbands' rule, and the offered role is extremely submissive. There was no remedy:

Am. But St. *Paul* Teaches, That Wives ought to be subject to their Husbands with all reverence: And St. *Peter* proposes to our imitation the Example of *Sarah*, who call'd her Husband Lord. ...

The advice contained in the dialogue is for the unhappy wife to adopt a strategy of pleasing her husband in all:

Am. My principal Care was to appear to my Husband always in a good humour, that so I might give him no occasion of disquiet; I observ'd his Affections and Inclinations; I observ'd proper times, and methods, by which he was most apt to be appeas'd, or offended; just as those do who reclaim your Elephants, and Lions, and such like Creatures, which are not to be overcome with force.

The beginning of the dialogue serves to create the atmosphere of intimacy between the participants in the communication, and the talk constructs women's friendship as

18. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it was common for non-literary dialogues to be built on fictional frames and display people of various professional roles in discussion (doctors, lawyers), or they relied on the wisdom literature model, a wise old man and a foolish youngster, a mother and daughter or a father and son (see Taavitsainen 2005). In this text, two intimate friends share experience and advice.

containing support, empathy, trust, and understanding.¹⁹ Compliments play an important role as social “strokes” reaffirming and strengthening friendship. In this context, they are part of what Tannen (1990: 77) calls “rapport talk”, where the phatic function overrides the informational. Without the opening scene between Amy and Lucy, the intimate discussion with private confessions would be much less credible.²⁰ The topics are identical to Present-day compliments to women: looks and garments. To modern ears, the bragging elements in the dialogue are reminiscent of children’s talk, but the young ladies of the scene cannot be very old, as the average age for marriage was very low at the time. The text itself shows many characteristics of misogynic treatises with a long tradition in literature, including, for instance, *The Wife of Bath’s Prologue*, though it is uncertain whether the effect is intended.

8. Fiction as data

An “ethnographic” study with key lexical items can successfully be performed only in large corpora; in smaller databases the examples are too few to allow conclusions. Our assumption was that, in an optimal case, examples detected by this method would give us insights into the emergence of the personal type of compliment in the history of English.²¹ In our earlier speech act study on verbal aggression (Taavitsainen and Jucker 2007), we used the Chadwyck-Healey on-line Corpora of fiction and drama from various periods to achieve an ethnographic view of what was considered insulting and caused verbal aggression. In this study we decided to make use of the same material. As mentioned earlier, Manes and Wolfson (1981: 115–116) argue that data like novels or plays are unsuitable for speech act studies, because they conform to artistic requirements and they do not “reflect exactly the complexity of actual speech use”. We agree entirely that fictional data cannot be taken as a substitute for spontaneous face-to-face conversations, but we hold that fictional data deserves to be investigated in its own right. It may give us insights into social practices in interaction in past periods better than any other kind of written data. The language use is in no way less “real” than in spontaneous conversation, but it is subject to very different constraints. The “real life” examples collected by cloze tests (i.e. gap-filling exercises) and the diary

19. These characteristics are considered key components of women’s friendship. The most noticeable feature in the talk of women friends is the construction of talk as a joint effort, in which all participants construct a shared text. In this written dialogue of 1696, the interaction achieves almost the same effect (cf. Coates 1996: 23, 117).

20. Compliments play a similar role to gossip in creating mutual trust and confirming interpersonal relations (see Coates 1989: 98).

21. We intend to continue our survey of compliments and other expressive speech acts with other corpora, with non-literary materials, in order to detect a larger pattern, but we felt that fiction and drama could serve as a logical point of departure and suited our present research question.

method are likely to miss more subtle overtones like irony and sarcasm; in the former they would be inappropriate and probably discarded, in the latter they may be difficult to capture. Fictional data may be better in displaying the large scale of compliments and their overtones, and narratorial commentary may be helpful for the interpretation of speaker illocutions and the perlocutionary effects of utterances.

The “artistic requirements” can be approached from another point of view, too, which is in terms of condensed or typified speech acts (see Fludernik 1993). We claim that the patterns detected in the Chadwyck-Healey database reflect what was going on in real life, but perhaps in a somewhat different and more focused form. The fascination of literature lies in its ability to capture essential features of life and present the chosen aspects in a way that gives them special significance. An illustrative example of what fictional materials can yield us, and how authors condense overtones of normal face-to-face interactions without losing their credibility, can be found e.g. in the following comparisons of fictitious and real-life comments. Compliments tend to occur at particular structural points in conversations, so much so that they are more or less expected at these places. Manes and Wolfson quote the following two examples in which the speakers jokingly refer to the expectation that a compliment would be in order at this point of the conversation. In example (14) S is offering pastries to her guests at a party.

- (14) S: Have one of these, I made them.
 A: (Takes a cookie)
 S: Now you have to tell me it’s good.
 (Manes and Wolfson 1981: 130)

In example (15) speaker A elicits a compliment from S and then comments on it.

- (15) A: John wouldn’t let us put a black phone here because ...
 (gestures to new furniture).
 S: I love these, by the way. They’re nice.
 A: Thank you. I’ve been waiting.
 (Manes and Wolfson 1981: 130)

Historical material offers similar examples, e.g. Oscar Wilde builds a sarcastic and ironic scene on the observation of an appropriate place for a compliment:

- (16) No; you see, to-morrow I am going to accept him. And I think it would be a good thing if I was able to tell him that I had – well, what shall I say? – £2000 a year left to me by a third cousin – or a second husband – or some distant relative of that kind. It would be an additional attraction, wouldn’t it? **You have a delightful opportunity now of paying me a compliment**, Windermere. But you are not very clever at paying compliments. I am afraid Margaret doesn’t encourage you in that excellent habit. It’s a great mistake on her part.

When men give up saying what is charming, they give up thinking what is charming. But seriously, ...

(Wilde, Oscar, 1854–1900: *Lady Windermere’s Fan* (1893), p. 65.)

Examples from earlier periods can also be found. The passage below reveals how easily compliments become weapons for a different kind of interaction:

(17) *Lord A.* I wish, Sir, I could return the compliment; but this extraordinary conduct –

Charles. No apologies my Lord, for your civil speech – you might easily have returned the compliment in the same words, and, believe me, with [175] as much sincerity as it was offered.

(Arnold, Samuel James, *Man and Wife* (1809), p. 35.)

Authors take their inspiration from everyday interactions, but they innovate and condense, use more varied patterns perhaps, but, to achieve verisimilitude, the topics of compliments, their formulations and the reactions to them have to follow real-life models. Our hypothesis is that the patterns of everyday, normal language use are reflected in fictional material. Genre conventions are important as they pose constraints; the utterances may be stylized and become stereotypical like the insults in saints’ lives (see Jucker and Taavitsainen 2000). In its imitation of everyday communication, the material in prose comedies is perhaps closest to spontaneous speech of past periods. Fictional material has its own limitations, but once its nature and its special kind of constraints are acknowledged, it gives us valuable and authentic material from past periods. Because of its vast array of interaction in various situations, it is able to reflect more varied and complex exchanges or utterances. Our claim is that corpus studies of comprehensive materials bring us closest to the ethnographic method when dealing with past periods and cultures.

9. Gender differences in early fiction corpora

The advantage of the Chadwyck-Healey drama and early fiction on-line corpora is that they contain comprehensive materials, and texts are recorded in full. The English fiction part covers texts from the sixteenth century to the twentieth century. In our assessment, we proceeded in the reverse chronological order, as our aim is to trace the personal type of compliments in our data. The following individual collections were included: *Nineteenth-century Fiction* with 250 novels from the period 1782–1903, *Eighteenth century Fiction 1700–1780* with 96 complete works, and *Early English Prose Fiction 1500–1700* with over 200 complete works in fictional prose. For the empirical part of this paper we focused on English prose in the following periods: Victorian Period, 1837–1901; Romantic Period, 1780–1837; Neoclassical Period, 1660–1785 and Renaissance Period, 1500–1660. English drama was also assessed, but poetry has its

own constraints and was left outside the scope of the present study. In addition, we consulted the drama corpus, *English Drama 1280–1915*, a database of 4,000 plays by 1,200 authors, for the corresponding periods.

With the Chadwyck-Healey corpora and our research task, it is impossible to achieve statistical data. The absolute occurrences are not comparable as the sizes of the corpora vary, but they serve to indicate the scope of our present task.

	Female authors		Male authors	
	Drama	Prose	Drama	Prose
Victorian Period, 1837–1901	12 entries, 30 hits	31 entries, 222 hits	223 entries, 387 hits	131 entries, 1339 hits
Romantic Period, 1780–1837	33 entries, 77 hits	51 entries, 634 hits	241 entries, 424 hits	60 entries, 323 hits
Neoclassical Period, 1660–1785	49 entries, 125 hits	48 entries, 288 hits	379 entries, 854 hits	63 entries, 1248 hits
Renaissance Period, 1500–1660	15 entries, 51 hits	4 entries, 20 hits	310 entries, 725 hits	35 entries, 137 hits
All four literary periods	89 entries, 210 hits	127 entries, 1132 hits	1028 entries, 2157 hits	266 entries, 2877 hits

To follow up the claim that women pay and receive more compliments than men and that the topics are different, we assessed women authors separately from men and specified the gender of the participants in fictional communication. Our assumption was that we should find more examples in the category of women authors' texts with women protagonists, that the topics of compliments would show different foci, and that the formulations would be different as well. The category "anonymous" is likely to contain works by female authors, but contrary to our expectation based on the CED texts, it proved insignificant in respect to use of compliments.

In this section, our aim is to illustrate different kinds of compliments in the history of English. Utterances that make up the compliment and its response are grouped according to topic. The examples are selected in order to give an overall view and are presented here in reverse chronological order.²²

22. The material also contained examples in translated literature, e.g. Molière's plays, but they are not included in the present assessment. Translations, of course, had an influence on later authors and playwrights, and the patterns and style of speech could be imitated.

9.1 Female authors’ compliments

According to studies on Present-day compliments, looks are the most frequent topic of compliments targeted at women. The same applies to our historical material, and examples are numerous. Responses reveal that compliments on looks are often downgraded to flattery.

- (18) *De R.* Lady Clanarlington, permit me to **congratulate you on your excellent looks** this morning. But I must not forget to ask after your fair daughters – though **daughters, indeed, appear impossible, when such a mother blooms before us.**
Lady C. Really, Monsieur, you are too complimentary; **no one can flatter so prettily as you do.**
 (Stuart-Wortley, Emmeline, Lady, *Moonshine* (1843), pp. 35–36.)²³

In example (18) the compliment is from a man to a woman. The response is complicated as it shows, at the same time, the speaker’s pleasure at receiving it, plays the compliment down to the category of insincere flattery and adds a counter compliment regarding the target’s mastering of the art of flattery. In example (19) by the same author, two women are negotiating illocutions and true meanings, contrasting words with physical signs of admiration, i.e. “gazing”. The response to the compliment is rejection, and the assigning of the comment to the category of flattery.²⁴

- (19) ... He never can have loved one half **as worthy,**
As beautiful, as good, pure, dear, as thou art!
 IMELDA. **Hush, flatterer!** Tell me, didst thou ne’er remark
 The Duke upon *thysself* intensely gazing?
 ANGIOLINA. On me? – Oh, no! On *me*? – Nay, I remember,
 At Prince Martini’s fête, some foolish words,
Exaggerated compliments, and praises,
That meant just nothing – were received as such; –
 (Stuart-Wortley, Emmeline, Lady, *Angiolina del’ Albano* (1841), p. 25.)

23. A similar compliment occurs in *Pride and Prejudice*, in a satirical comment by Mr Bennett to his wife: “You and the girls may go, or you may send them by themselves, which perhaps will be still better, for as you are as handsome as any of them, Mr Bingley might like you the best of the party.” Knowing Mr Bennett’s character, the reader can interpret it as a satirical remark, but for the target the satirical tone goes unnoticed. His wife replies: “My dear, you flatter me. I certainly have had my share of beauty, but I do not pretend to be any thing extraordinary now” (Austen, Jane, *Pride and Prejudice*, 1813, p. 52). It is the author’s skill that ensures such comments play a double role. This example was detected by the “philological method”, i.e. reading the book, and it shows that our method catches only a small part of compliments in the works assessed.

24. There are more examples to support flattery as the closest neighboring speech act, e.g. “(*aside.*) ’Tis too like *flattery* this, and doth not please me: It looks like some design – some studied wile.” (Stuart-Wortley, Emmeline, Lady, *Eva* (1840), p. 63.)

Example (20) contains a compliment from a man to a woman on the beauty of her hair, embedded in a somewhat affective speech turn of welcoming the visitor. The compliment is simply ignored; the reply is a polite wish in response to the greeting. The man continues in the same vein as he started.

- (20) “I have been worse, yes. Come in. You shall not go. I am mewed in as a prisoner, and have none to speak to, and no one to look at but old Dunes. Come in, and take that stool by the fire, and let me hear you speak, **and let me rest my eyes a while on your golden hair – gold, more golden than that of the Indies.**”
 “I hope you are better, sir,” said Judith, **ignoring the compliment.**
 “**I am better now I have seen you.** I shall be worse if you do not come in.”
 (Baring-Gould, Sabine, *In the Roar of the Sea* (1892), p. 128.)

The interaction in example (21) takes place between two women. The younger woman pays a compliment to the older on her handsome looks. The answer is somewhat cynical, playing it down. The narrator’s comments describe Mrs Transome for the reader as deserving of the compliment.

- (21) ...you’ve such a face and figure, and will have if you live to be eighty, that everybody is cap in hand to you before they know who you are – let me fasten up your veil a little higher: there’s a good deal of pleasure in life for you yet...” “Nonsense! there’s no pleasure for old women, unless they get it out of tormenting other people... As Mrs Transome descended the stone staircase in her old black velvet and point, **her appearance justified Denner’s personal compliment.** She had that high-born imperious air which would have marked her as an object of hatred and reviling by a revolutionary mob. Her person was too typical of social distinctions to be passed by with indifference by any one: it would have fitted an empress in her own right,
 (Eliot, George, *Felix Holt* (1866), pp. 48–49.)

Example (22) contains a compliment from a woman to a man on his looks in a military uniform. The response shows acceptance by bowing. This gesture is typically male and mentioned several times in connection with compliments offered to men. The assessable “good” is “your regimentals”, an institutional outfit that shows the accomplishments and rank of the person wearing it. Thus the compliment is not strictly on looks. The response continues with counter compliments on the taste and beauty of the speaker, but the wordings are not given (cf. example (37) below).

- (22) “Not of *Roman virtues*, I believe, Sir; they had in them too much of the destructive spirit which Mrs. Melmoth thinks so admirable.”
 “Indeed, I said nothing about *Roman virtues*, nor do I trouble myself with such subjects – I merely admired the soldiers because they are so brave and so polite; besides, **the military dress is so very elegant and becoming** – Dear, Mr. Pemberton, how charmingly you must look in your regimentals!”

Mr. Pemberton, **bowing in return to the compliment, made an animated eulogium on the taste and beauty of the speaker.**

(Hays, Mary, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796), pp. 38–39.)

An older woman is talking to a young girl in example (23), paying a compliment on her father’s looks and transferring the qualities to the target (cf. above). The response is positive but the girl modifies the compliment with a comment on the father’s aging, thus inspiring another compliment. The scene shows how social “stroking” works in establishing interpersonal relations.

(23) **“What eyes! so like your dear father’s!** How we shall love each other – shan’t we, darling? For his sake!”

“I’ll try,” said Molly, bravely; and then she could not finish her sentence.

“And you’ve just got **the same beautiful black curling hair!**” said Mrs. Kirkpatrick, softly lifting one of Molly’s curls from off her white temple.

“Papa’s hair is growing grey,” said Molly.

“Is it? I never see it. I never shall see it. **He will always be to me the handsomest of men.**”

Mr. Gibson was really a very handsome man, and **Molly was pleased with the compliment;** but she could not help saying, –

“Still he will grow old, and his hair will grow grey. I think he will be just as handsome, but it won’t be as a young man.”

(Gaskell, Elizabeth Cleghorn, *Wives and Daughters* (1866), p. 125.)

There are other similar examples in the material. Example (24) shows a woman making positive comments about relations of the target. The reaction is a faint smile, an expression of positive feeling.

(24) Miss Arrowpoint is as nice as possible. **It is not all young ladies who have mothers as handsome and graceful as yours and Anna’s.”**

Mrs Davilow smiled faintly at **this little compliment,** ...

(Eliot, George, *Daniel Deronda* (1876), p. 55.)

Possessions were discussed as an important topic in contrastive studies, and they are given a prominent place in discussions on Present-day compliments. In our historical material possessions are mentioned only occasionally.²⁵ The lack of compliments of this kind may be due to social norms. Perhaps it was considered improper or uncivilized to comment on possessions just as it was not proper to discuss money in polite society.

In example (25) the protagonists are middle class. A man is paying compliments to a woman. First the floor and the kitchen are complimented upon, and then the praise is extended to the skills of the target, fit to serve as a model to all farmers’ wives.

25. The exception is the dialogue between newly married ladies in (13) from 1696 where garments play an important role.

The response is acceptance and acknowledgement of the speaker's pleasant behavior. There are several examples of the kind in the same text.

- (25) "Our feet are quite dry; we shall not soil **your beautiful floor.**"
 "O, sir, don't mention it," said Mrs Poyser. "Will you and the Captain please to walk into the parlour?"
 "No, indeed, thank you, Mrs Poyser," said the Captain, looking eagerly round the kitchen, as if his eye were seeking something it could not find. "**I delight in your kitchen. I think it is the most charming room I know. I should like every farmer's wife to come and look at it for a pattern.**"
 "O, you're pleased to say so, sir. Pray take a seat," said Mrs Poyser, **relieved a little by this compliment** and the Captain's evident good-humour, but still glancing anxiously at Mr Irwine...
 (Eliot, George, *Adam Bede* (1859), p. 145.)

Example (26) displays the upper class polished manners of repaying compliments with counter-compliments. The exchange of turns is between two men. A young woman is present as well and the compliment is targeted at her, too. The compliment is disguised as a confession. The "goods" are the cottage and something as abstract as air; but it is actually the location that is referred to. The response is payment in kind, with an accompanying gesture.

- (26) "I envy you **this cottage**, my good friends," said St. Aubert, as he met them, "**it is so pleasant, so quiet, and so neat; and this air, that one breathes – if any thing could restore lost health, it would surely be this air.**"
 La Voisin bowed gratefully, and replied, with the gallantry of a Frenchman, "**Our cottage may be envied, sir, since you and Mademoiselle have honoured it with your presence.**" St. Aubert gave him a friendly smile for **his compliment**, and sat down to a table, ...
 (Radcliffe, Ann Ward, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), pp. 197–198.)

There are surprisingly few compliments on food in the present material, perhaps due to the social norms, protagonists being mostly upper class and not directly associated with the preparation of meals. Example (27) is one of the few exceptions. It shows strategic use of positive evaluation. The target is pleasantly flattered by the compliment on the taste of her home-brewed ale and the request for some is fulfilled.

- (27) "I don't take wine Mrs. Markham," said Mr. Millward, upon the introduction of that beverage; "I'll take a little of your home-brewed ale. **I always prefer your home-brewed to any thing else.**"
Flattered at this compliment, my mother rang the bell, and a china jug of our best ale was presently brought, and set before the worthy gentleman who so well knew how to appreciate its excellencies.

“Now **THIS is the thing!**” cried he, pouring ...
(Brontë, Anne, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), p. 72.)

Besides looks and possessions, very few other topics are found in the material. Example (28) below is very similar to Holmes’s example given in Note 5 on parenting skills, and it also shows the target’s eagerness to hear some positive comments on herself.

- (28) He began speaking of Harriet, and speaking of her with more voluntary praise than Emma had ever heard before.
“I cannot rate her beauty as you do,” said he; “but she is a pretty little creature, and I am inclined to think very well of her disposition. Her character depends upon those she is with; but in good hands she will turn out a valuable woman.”
“I am glad you think so; and the good hands, I hope, may not be wanting.”
“Come,” said he, “**you are anxious for a compliment, so I will tell you that you have improved her. You have cured her of her school-girl’s giggle; she really does you credit.**”
“Thank you. I should be mortified indeed if I did not believe I had been of some use; but it is not every body who will bestow praise where they may. **You do not often overpower me with it.**”
“You are expecting her again, you say, this morning?”
“Almost every moment. She has been gone longer already than she intended.”
(Austen, Jane, *Emma* (1816), pp. 119–120.)

Example (29) praises a musical performance. Such compliments are surprisingly rare in the present material.

- (29) Anne, very much preferring the office of musician to a more active post, played country dances to them by the hour together; a kindness which always recommended her musical powers to the notice of Mr. and Mrs. Musgrove more than any thing else, and **often drew this compliment**; – “Well done, Miss Anne! very well done indeed! Lord bless me! how those little fingers of yours fly about!”
(Austen, Jane, *Persuasion* (1818), pp. 107–108.)

According to the variationist view of language change, tracing the emergence of the Present-day compliment also involves tracing occurrences of the ceremonial compliment. The word *compliment*, understood in a broader sense, including other speech acts like greetings, occurs a few times. In example (30), it seems to refer to a chain of speech acts with a salutation and an invitation. The wording is described as delicate but not given. In example (31), the reference is probably to a salutation containing expressions of pleasure. These passages are very much in line with the definition presented by Beetz about pre-modern German compliments (see above).

- (30) ...when greatly to my surprise, he entered the park, mounted on his costly black hunter, and crossed over the grass to meet me. **He saluted me with a**

very fine compliment, delicately worded, and modestly delivered withal, which, he had doubtless concocted as he rode along. He told me he had brought a message from his mother, who, as he was riding that way, had desired him to call at the manor and beg the pleasure of my company to a friendly, family dinner tomorrow.

(Brontë, Anne, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), p. 166.)

- (31) He came. He was light and gay in his habit and address. His voice possessed an unusual softness; and his cheek was flushed with an hectic colour, equally proceeding, I thought, from want of rest and intemperance. “Mr. Davenport,” said I, **interrupting his compliments**, “you will convince me most that you are pleased with this interview by answering the questions I shall propose with seriousness and sincerity.”

(Fenwick, Eliza, *Secresy* (1795), pp. 12–13.)

Good wishes are also included in ceremonial compliments, and there are examples of such speech acts in the material of the Romantic period.

- (32) “What pity that the wealthy, who can command such sunshine, should ever pass their days in gloom – in the cold shade of selfishness! **For you, my young friend, may the sun always shine as brightly as at this moment; may your own conduct always give you the sunshine of benevolence and reason united!**” Valancourt, **highly flattered by this compliment**, could make no reply but by a **smile of gratitude**.

(Radcliffe, Ann Ward, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), pp. 140–141.)

Sir Timothy Compliment is given as a name of a character of a play from 1662. His speeches abound in clichés and sound like quotes from the handbooks of etiquette referred to above. The mocking ironic tone of the play is evident. Another character is called *Sir Vain Complement* in another of the same author’s plays from 1662.

- (33) *Sir Timothy Compliment*. **Bright beauty**, may I be your Servant.
Lady Amorous. **If I have any beauty, it was begot in your Eyes**. And takes light from your commendations.
Sir Timothy Compliment. **You are Lady, the Starre of your Sex**.
Lady Amorous. **No truly, I am but a Meteor** that soon goeth out.
 (Newcastle, Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of, *Love’s Adventures* (1662), p. 5.)

This example shows dueling with words. The convention of naming characters after qualities or characteristics is a carry over from the medieval period.

9.2 Male authors’ compliments

Compliments by male authors partly repeat the same patterns as found in female authors’ works but the range is wider. Looks are an important topic, with not only women

being complimented on their looks, but men as well. Example (34) shows a compliment from a man to a woman playfully acknowledged.

- (34) *Cev. (crosses L. to Madame)* **Ah, Madame! always charming – always radiant! How lovely you are to-night!**
Mad. de Fon. **Hush, hush, or the Abbé will scold you! I have to confess to him, and your delicate compliments will oblige me to add another to my list of sins. Item – to one indulgence in feminine vanity. No, not a word will I hear!**
(cross to R. H. to Fouche)
 (Taylor, Tom / Lang, John, *Plot and Passion* (1854), p. 19.)

An ironic response is found in example (35) to a compliment from a man to a woman. The physical reaction of a smile reveals the pleasure at receiving the compliment.

- (35) *Clari.* Oh, I give you permission! I’m not jealous. Come, Mr. De Vere – come and sit by me, if you can put up with such poor company.
De V. **The conversation of an intelligent woman is always delightful.**
(Sits by her.)
Rash. (To Mary.) Will you risk the laurels you have won?
Mary. If you are my antagonist –
Rash. **Conquest agrees with you. You look more beautiful than usual to-night.**
(Sits at the chess table.)
Mary. (Smiling.) You wish to keep **your compliments** from rusting.
 (Lovell, George W. (George William), *Look before You Leap* (1888), p. 14.)

Example (36) contains an interesting response which raises the argument used by modern critics of gendered language use of how women’s professional performance can be downgraded by comments on their outfit or looks.

- (36) *Julia.* Herr Dummkopf, a word with you, if you please.
Ern. **Beautiful English maiden –**
Julia. **No compliments, I beg. I desire to speak with you on a purely professional matter, so we will, if you please, dispense with allusions to my personal appearance,** which can only tend to widen the breach which already exists between us.
 (Gilbert, W. S. (William Schwenck), *The Grand Duke* (1902–1911), p. 50.)

Example (37) is similar to example (22), quoted above, as it contains a compliment from a woman to a man and refers to an institutional outfit that denotes power. The reaction is acceptance and adopting the outfit as a new topic of discussion.

- (37) *Judge.* Yes, come now, be quick. I can’t keep the Grand Jury waiting. Where shall I sit? Here? *(Goes to chair up stage.)*
Aloy. That will do excellently, Sir John. Permit me.

(*Arranges robes, then focusses, rather nervously.*)

Lady An. Sir John, **you must allow me to compliment you upon the impressive effect of your judicial robes.**

Judge. **Rather tasty, I think. But it's not so much the robes as the wig. There's a great deal more in this wig than you'd suppose,** Miss Collins.

Lady An. That I can quite believe, Sir John.

(Gilbert, W. S. (William Schwenck), *The Fairy's Dilemma* (1911), p. 12.)

A common type of compliment is given in example (38). There are several passages with similar compliments, from man to woman.

(38) "The fog is very dense indeed!" said I.

"Not that it affects you, though, I am sure," said Mr. Guppy, putting up the steps. "On the contrary, **it seems to do you good, miss, judging from your appearance.**"

I knew he meant well in paying me this compliment, so I laughed at myself for blushing at it, ...

(Dickens, Charles, *Bleak House* (1853), p. 25.)

The above examples are in accordance with the observations on female authors' compliments. However, the topics of male authors' compliments are more varied in their range and more attention is paid to issues of social standing. There are also several instances where nationality, the English language, or patriotism in general is mentioned. These topics are absent from female authors' examples.

Example (39) contains a string of compliments from a man to a woman, first of the very traditional kind derived from the etiquette books perhaps, then on the looks, and finally on the nationality of the woman. The response is interesting and contains the downplaying of the compliment to the category of flattery, and then the turning of the attention to the pleasure of hearing English and "so charmingly spoken":

(39) *Dalton.* Torment us how she may – **woman, dear woman, must still be the solace of our lives!**

Ner. As the only lady in company, that **compliment** must belong to me –
(*aside. Dalton turns and sees her*)

I fear, Sir, as a stranger, **you flatter me!**

Dalton. I must first learn how to do justice to **so charming a creature!** but say, **my pretty one,** who are you? and how came **so lovely an English woman** in these rude mountains?

Ner. Well, **how delightful it is, to hear our native tongue, now and then so charmingly spoken!**

(Dudley, Henry Bate, Sir, *The Travellers in Switzerland* (1794), pp. 30–31.)

In this material men seldom pay compliments to other men, but such examples are found in (40) and (41). Nationality and the English language are the topics of

compliments between men in example (40) and social standing in (41). In both, the compliments are accepted.

- (40) There were but eight or nine persons present when I entered the royal chamber. The most *distingué* of these I recognized immediately as the – . He came forward with much grace as I approached, and **expressed his pleasure at seeing me.** “**You were presented,** I think, about a month ago,” added the – , with a smile of singular fascination; “**I remember it well.**”

I bowed low to this compliment.

“Do you propose staying long at Paris?” continued the – .

“I protracted,” I replied, “my departure solely for the **honour this evening affords me.** In so doing, please your – , I have followed the wise maxim of **keeping the greatest pleasure to the last.**”

The royal chevalier bowed to my answer with a smile still sweeter than before, and began a conversation with me which lasted for several minutes. I was much struck with the – ’s air and bearing. They possess great dignity, without any affectation of its assumption. **He speaks peculiarly good English, and the compliment of addressing me in that language was therefore as judicious as delicate.** His observations owed little to his rank; they would have struck you as appropriate, and the air which accompanied them pleased you as graceful, even in a simple individual. Judge, then, if they charmed me in the – .

(Lytton, Edward Bulwer Lytton, Baron, *Pelham* (1828), pp. 251–252.)

- (41) PETER. There, Sir – there – you look quite different from what you did when you first came – **you look, for all the world, like my young master, and he’s a gentleman.**

LINDOR. **I am flattered by your compliment.**

PETER. Any thing else, Sir, can I do for you?

(Hook, Theodore Edward, *Safe and Sound* (1809), pp. 57–58.)

Example (42) comes from an earlier period, from 1739/40, and contains a compliment from a man to a woman, perhaps a quote from an etiquette book. It is not accepted.

- (42) *Dam.* Fair Nymph, that dost outshine the brightest Stars –
Phil. **Your Compliments are all thrown away upon me.** You sail against the Wind, I assure you.

(Bellamy, Daniel, *The Rival Nymphs* (1739, 1740), p. 60.)

Manners of polite society are commented upon in example (43) from 1675. The social practice of salutation contains humiliating elements as well, cf. example (6):

- (43) *She runs forward to salute him, he still goes backward, and Compliments.*
Sir *Man.* Honourable Aunt! The extream Joys and Felicities of your Society, which a long Parenthesis of time has interrupted, but now Time, as it were penitent – *Still runs back.*

Lady Fad. Why dost not salute me, Nephew?

Sir Man. Yes Madam, as soon as ever I have done my Compliments.

La. Fad. Oh, thou shouldst salute the first thing thou dost.

Sir Man. Yes Madam, but a Salute being a kind of a Present, or rather Tribute to a Lady, and as one would not present an empty Purse for Tribute to a Princess, so neither an empty Mouth to a Lady, but as full of Rich and Golden Compliments, as it could hold.

La. Fad. This is witty to extremity, I swear; Salute me, that I may be at leisure to praise thee.

Sir Man. Your most Humble Servant, Aunt.

(*He salutes her.*)

Boob. Your Worships most Humble Servant.

(Crown, John, *The Countrey Wit* (1675), p. 50.)

10. Discussion and conclusion

Compliments are gendered speech acts, connected with positive politeness. They are social moves to create solidarity and intimacy between parties of communication. This function is prominent in our historical material, especially in example (13), the dialogue between two newly-married ladies. Holmes (1995: 152) argues that, for women, complimenting is primarily about strengthening solidarity while, for men, complimenting is more ambivalent. It is also used to assert one's authority and to evaluate the other. This motivation is discussed in connection with examples (22) and (37), but power play is not very prominent. Most compliments from men to women in our material seem to be connected with flirting and establishing good relations, perhaps to be developed in the future, as in example (20) and (38).

As social moves, compliments make the target feel good, but complimenting may be a strategy to achieve some other goals as well. Seemingly positive "strokes" may have multiple motivations. Our material contains plenty of irony and sarcastic language use, which was to be expected in literary data (see above). The affective and instrumental goals are closely intertwined (see example 27), and it is often difficult to tell them apart. Furthermore, compliments with the same wording can often be interpreted quite differently by different interactional participants and depending on subtle nuances of the situation. To our advantage, fictional material often contains explications.

Like greetings, thanks and apologies, compliments require a second component (cf. Pomerantz 1978). This quality brings them close to routines. A compliment needs to be answered, and in this respect a positive comment is said to work like "how are you" (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003: 139, 153).²⁶ Responses to compliments vary,

26. In some languages this development is highlighted. It is possible to use proverbs and ritualized phrases as compliments, for instance in Arabic (Wolfson 1981: 120).

and in real life the reactions are often ambivalent. Possible second parts include thanks, rejections, disagreement, credit transfer to somebody else, ignoring the compliment or paying back in kind (Chen 1993; Schneider 1999; Golato 2002, 2005). Our material did not display the whole variety. The most common reaction is to downplay the compliment to the category of flattery. As non-verbal reactions, smiles and bowing are mentioned. Reciprocating compliments is also possible; in our material it often takes the metaform of complimenting on the art of complimenting.

Compliments are loaded with cultural values and associated with cultural norms that are by no means uniform even across the English-speaking world today. The historical dimension poses additional complications: there seem to be norms of complimenting and polite behavior, but it is extremely difficult for a modern scholar to catch the constraints without a profound knowledge of the social history of the period. Looks are the most common topic, but, for example, the paucity of compliments on possessions is likely to be connected with societal norms. Our material does not contain compliments on taste, decoration of rooms, curtains, or gardens either. All these topics, and several others, are perfectly appropriate for compliments in our present-day world, so much so that positive evaluations are almost expected of new acquisitions. This may be a more recent trend and may be due to changes in societal values, as newness has become a highly appreciated quality in our consumer society. The lack of examples in our material does not, however, mean that they would have been outside the scope of legitimate “goods” to be complimented even in the earlier periods.

The second aim of our paper was to develop the methodology of speech act retrieval in computerized corpora. We tested lexical searches with positive evaluation, which located the best sample texts for us. The speech act label “compliment” gave us plenty of material with compliments explicitly labeled as such, and our method can be described as a computer-aided ethnographic survey. Jucker, Schneider, Taavitsainen and Breustedt (this volume) investigate the claims made on routine formula by corpus-linguistic methods. In speech act studies, however, qualitative readings are necessary for the final identification of the speech act function.

Speech acts are firmly embedded in social practices, and connecting the routines of day-to-day performance to larger societal discourses reveals their significance (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003: 55). The task is demanding for present-day materials, but even more so for historical data. The opening of the dialogue between the newly-married ladies in 1696 presents social talk between good friends, reestablishing intimacy and confidence after a period of time. The tone is light at first and deals with looks and fashions, but as the discourse unfolds the discussion becomes serious and confidential with negative aspects of women’s lives in the forefront. For a modern reader, the dialogue acts as an eye-opener to the social conditions and position of women three hundred years ago. Background facts are important for the interpretation and understanding of these texts.

In recent literature, explanations are offered on why it seems to be more appropriate to compliment women than men. Women are “seen as appropriate recipients of all

manner of social judgments in the form of compliments ... the way a woman is spoken to is, no matter what her status, a subtle and powerful way of perpetuating her subordinate role in society.” (Holmes 1988: 452; Wolfson 1984: 243). A great deal remains to be done for equal opportunities and improving the position of women, but, in principle, the world today is a different place than it was in 1696. Women in the modern Western world have the right to property, the right to vote, the right to take part in political life, access to higher education and the way is open even to the highest positions in society²⁷, but still we can talk about an invisible “glass ceiling” that limits opportunities and prohibits girls’ and women’s development. Patronizing tones are present in some examples, but, on the whole, power play is not prominent. Interpersonal functions prevail. In this perspective it is remarkable how similar the social “strokes” are in the text from 1696 and other historical materials when compared to modern data, though there are differences in the “goods” that form the topics of compliments. Perhaps we can find an explanation in human nature and human culture: the definition of positive face emphasizes the need to be accepted, appreciated and liked by others and compliments are important means to convey this appreciation, but at the same time societal norms dictate appropriate topics.

Corpora

A Corpus of English Dialogues 1560–1760 (2006). Compiled under the supervision of Merja Kytö (Uppsala University) and Jonathan Culpeper (Lancaster University)

EEBO, *Early English Books Online*. <http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home> *Literature Online (LION)* at <http://lion.chadwyck.com/>.

ZEN, *Zurich English Newspaper Corpus*. Compiled under the supervision of Udo Fries (University of Zurich). For details see: <http://es-zen.unizh.ch/>

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27. In the perspective of our present material, these rights are fairly recent. In Britain, women received the right to vote in 1928 (New Zealand 1893). The Universal Education Act of 1872 made greater educational opportunities available for women from a larger spectrum. The first academic degrees by women were received at the end of the nineteenth century, e.g. at the University of London in 1880.

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Apologies in the history of English

Routinized and lexicalized expressions of responsibility and regret

Andreas H. Jucker and Irma Taavitsainen

1. Introduction

With an apology a speaker expresses regret for a past event and usually accepts some sort of direct or indirect responsibility for this event. However, such a description can only be approximate since there are both synchronic and diachronic variations in this speech act. Different speech communities may have very different ideas of what an apology is, when one is called for, and what makes a sincere apology. Many researchers have endeavoured to explore the differences between apologies in different languages (e.g. Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper 1989; Clyne, Ball and Neil 1991; Trosborg 1994; Reiter 2000) or between native and non-native speakers of the same language (e.g. Cohen et al. 1986; García 1989; Cohen 1998), but to our knowledge nobody has attempted to trace the historical development of apologies or to compare their realizations across time. It appears that apologies have a very widespread relevance, perhaps they are even universal. But definitions differ. In fact, it may even be difficult to define a functional common core to all realizations of what are commonly called “apologies” or their cognates in different languages.

We have argued elsewhere (Jucker and Taavitsainen 2000; Taavitsainen and Jucker 2007) that a diachronic analysis of speech acts may be viewed as a contrastive analysis across time. Instead of two or more languages, two or more stages of the same language are under investigation, with the obvious difference that in a diachronic analysis the different stages are ordered into earlier and later, the later stages seen as developments of the earlier stages, while in a contrastive analysis the languages under comparison may be unrelated. However, in both a contrastive analysis and a diachronic analysis it must be ensured that comparable speech act functions are being compared. This is the problem of the *tertium comparationis* (Krzyszowski 1984, 1989), that is to say, we must identify the element that stays constant across the comparison.

2. Apology as a speech act: Criteria for comparison

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* an apology is

[a]n explanation offered to a person affected by one's action that no offence was intended, coupled with the expression of regret for any that may have been given; or, a frank acknowledgement of the offence with expression of regret for it, by way of reparation. (*OED Online* 2004, "apology", n.)

This definition focuses on the person affected by the speaker's action, the explanation offered and the expression of regret for this action. This could be formulated in Searlean types of felicity conditions in analogy to his felicity conditions for speech acts such as *thank (for)*, *advise* and *warn* (Searle 1969: 66–67; see also Aijmer 1996: 81; Lakoff 2001: 205):

Propositional content: Past act A done by S

Preparatory: A displeases H and S believes A displeases H

Sincerity: S feels sorry for A

Essential: Counts as an expression of remorse by S for A

According to Deutschmann (2003: 44–47) an apology includes the following four "basic components":

- An "offender", who takes responsibility for some offence
- An "offended", who is affected, potentially affected or just perceived to be affected by the offence
- An "offence", which may be real, potential or only perceived as offence
- A "remedy", which is a "recognition of the offence, acceptance of responsibility and a display of regret" (Deutschmann 2003: 46).

In some instances apologies are also issued on acts that have not been performed by S but for which S nonetheless feels directly or indirectly responsible. And this is where cultures may vary considerably. How much responsibility is necessary for an apology? Is it appropriate for a speaker to apologize for something that not she has done but her children, her husband, or her parents? Is it appropriate to apologize for the poor weather conditions if you have guests visiting from abroad? Is it appropriate to apologize if the speaker is responsible for some act that may displease H but which the speaker herself does not think was a mistake? Does a boss apologize when she dismisses one of her employees, an act which is very likely to displease H and for which S may well feel sorry? Does an apology entail an admission of guilt? Different cultures may also differ in their judgments as to what counts as an offence. Cohen (1998: 81), for instance, reports that in Japan it is normal for a guest to apologize after a nice meal, because of all the trouble for the host who had to invite the guest, prepare the meal and entertain the guest, and who will later have to wash the dishes. It is clear that even within one culture different individuals may have different opinions on the four

components of apologies, and rather bigger differences may be expected across cultures and languages, even when they have a speech function that roughly corresponds to the felicity conditions given above.

The most comprehensive list of Illocutionary Force Indicating Devices (IFIDs) of apologies is given by Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989: 290) as part of their coding manual for the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP): *sorry, excuse me, I apologize for..., forgive me, pardon me for..., I regret that..., I'm afraid ...* These IFIDs are “formulaic, routinized expressions in which the speaker’s apology is made explicit” (1989: 290). They form one of five major strategies that can be used singly or in any combination to perform an apology (Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper 1989: 289):

- Illocutionary Force Indicating Device (IFID)
- Taking on Responsibility
- Explanation or Account
- Offer of Repair
- Promise of Forbearance

The following example illustrates the five strategies (Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper 1989: 290).

- (1) I’m sorry (IFID), I missed the bus (RESPONSIBILITY), and there was a terrible traffic jam (EXPLANATION). Let’s make another appointment (REPAIR). I’ll make sure that I’m here on time (FORBEARANCE).

Among these strategies only the first is routinized to such an extent that it can be used as search patterns for a corpus-based investigation.

Olshtain (1989), who investigated the frequency of the various strategies in four different languages on the basis of a discourse completion task (seven different situations), found that IFIDs were used by a percentage of respondents that ranged between 60 per cent and 75 per cent. The languages investigated were Hebrew, Canadian French, Australian English and German. Apart from IFIDs, Taking Responsibility was the most frequent strategy for all four languages ranging between 65 per cent and 70 per cent.¹

3. Contrastive versus historical speech act analysis

Methodologically there is an important and obvious difference between contrastive speech act analyses that rely on modern data and analyses that rely on historical data. In the former, various forms of discourse completion tasks and role-playing can be

1. These data are based on three languages only, i.e. without German. However, the percentage of IFIDs varied considerably across the different situations which were used to elicit apologies. In Australian English, for instance, the percentages ranged from 45 per cent to 87 per cent.

used (e.g. Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper 1989; Trosborg 1994) because native speakers are available and often the researcher has a native or near-native command of the language(s) under investigation. In discourse completion tasks the respondents produce written responses that are supposed to represent typical specimens in spoken interaction. Deutschmann (2003: 15) quotes research that shows that such written responses are shorter and more stereotypical than the corresponding speech acts produced in real conversations. McDonough (1981: 80) distinguishes between role-playing and role enactment (see also Trosborg 1994: 144; Deutschmann 2003: 15). In role-playing the participants pretend to be someone else and react as they assume that person would react in a given situation. In a role enactment they assume a role that they are familiar with from their own life.

In a diachronic analysis such research tools are out of the question. We have to rely on written evidence and we cannot elicit specific realizations of speech acts under laboratory conditions as it were. Thus a historical analysis necessarily has to rely on corpus data.

The restriction to written corpus data is not seen as an insurmountable problem in historical pragmatics (see e.g. Culpeper and Kytö 2000; Jucker 2000), but corpora differ, and we have to ensure that the data are comparable. In the case of speech acts, it begs the question as to how individual instances of specific speech acts can be identified. In this respect, it is important to distinguish on the one hand between descriptions of speech acts and realizations of speech acts, and on the other hand between speech act verbs and their associated speech acts (see Taavitsainen and Jucker 2007).

According to our corpus survey on speech act verbs of verbal aggression, speech act verbs are very often used not performatively but descriptively. Collocations of neighbouring speech acts may provide additional information about the development and status of the lexical items under scrutiny. In Jucker and Taavitsainen (2000) and in Taavitsainen and Jucker (2007) we focused on descriptions of insults. In the latter we tried to provide a fairly comprehensive account of speech act verbs of verbal aggression. We argued that a study of speech act verbs provides an ethnographic view on how a speech community categorises speech acts, which speech acts are important and how they are described.

In this study we expect to find an ethnographic view as well, though apologies seem to be very different from insults. In our earlier study we noticed that descriptions of insults are more prominent than performative instances of insults. In this study on apologies, we shift the angle and focus on performative instances and in particular on the routinized and conventionalized forms of apologies. Our searches for lexical items in the first person singular, therefore, do not yield clear examples of descriptive uses of speech act verbs with neighbouring speech acts, but some observations can be made. In the case of apologies, such neighbouring speech acts could, for instance, be humiliating speech acts, confessions, and regrets.

4. Apology as a speech act in Present-day and Renaissance English

A contrastive as well as a diachronic analysis of apologies is based on the assumption that the core of this speech function is sufficiently similar across languages or across the history of one language. What differs is the realization of the apology. In Present-day English, it often appears in routinized form. Deutschmann (2003) uses speech act verbs of apologizing to investigate apologies in Present-day British English. He argues that

apologising tends to be accompanied by a limited set of easily identifiable routine formulae. Of course it is theoretically possible to apologise without saying I'm sorry or excuse me but research has shown that this is rarely the case in English. (Deutschmann 2003: 36; he quotes Meier 1998 as evidence but does not list the source in his references)

Expressions like *sorry*, *pardon* or *excuse me* can function as apologies. Thus, a performative verb alone can count as an expression of remorse by the speaker.

In the earlier periods of the English language, as our analysis will show, the act of apologizing was less routinized and more explicit. Even though the same lexical elements could already be used (*sorry*, *pardon*, *excuse*, *forgive*), they did not have the same independent force as today. Our research is restricted to the precursors of apologies that in Present-day English often occur in lexicalized and routinized forms and assess how the form and function of Present-day routinized and lexicalized items that count as apologies are manifested in negotiations of interpersonal relations in Renaissance prose drama and prose fiction. We decided to focus on the occurrences of *excuse me*, *pardon me*, *I beg your pardon*, *I am sorry*, *forgive me*, *I am afraid* and relevant spelling variants and abbreviated forms such as *sorrie*, *sorie*, and *I'm sorry*. Consequently, there must be a substantial number of apologies that we did not detect because they were not accompanied by such phrases.

Bergner (1992) has argued that in medieval texts the explicit use of speech act verbs was much more common than in modern English (1992: 169). Kohnen (2000a: 183, 2000b: 317) provides the necessary empirical evidence for this claim. Explicit performative directives are seven times as frequent in the Old English section of the *Helsinki Corpus* as in the *LOB* corpus of Modern English. But it is clear that a search for a particular speech act verb will retrieve only some subset of all direct realizations of its associated speech act in any given corpus. Kohnen's statistics relate to the frequency of performatively used speech act verbs in relation to corpus size, but they do not say anything about the relation between explicit performative speech acts and implicit performative speech acts, i.e. speech acts that are realised without a speech act verb.

Thus, even if our search retrieves only a subset of all apologies, it is likely to be a fairly substantial subset, and we believe that it is a very important subset, quite irrespective of its frequency, because the IFID constitutes the routinized and lexicalized expression of an apology. Our aim is to show what role the lexical items that count as apologies in Present-day English had in the Renaissance period. By doing this, we want to provide a

further case study in diachronic speech act analysis in a contrastive frame and, at the same time, a pilot study of the development of apologies in a longer diachronic perspective.

5. Data

Deutschmann's (2003) material consists of a subset of the one-hundred-million-word *British National Corpus (BNC)* of Present-day spoken and written British English. Deutschmann's subcorpus comprises just over five million words produced by 1700 speakers and contains all the dialogues of the *BNC* which were produced by speakers whose age and gender were known (Deutschmann 2003: 13).

For our current pilot project we have collected apologies from the Renaissance fiction and drama sections of *LION*, the Chadwyck Healey on-line Corpus (1500–1660).² We do not claim that fiction and drama are direct representations of real speech, but we claim that as imitations of spontaneous dialogues they are closer to real speech than other forms of written language and that these genres provide genuine data in their own right as well. For a more detailed discussion, see Taavitsainen and Jucker on Compliments in this volume.

6. Negotiations of interpersonal relations: Typical manifestations of apologies in our data

Prose texts of literary fiction and drama typically contain direct speech quotations with realizations of speech acts, such as apologies, in negotiations of interpersonal relations. Realizations of speech acts may occur in various forms and, to give an idea of typical manifestations, we quote some examples from different types of data. In general, drama contains more frequent examples of lexicalized and routinized apologies than prose fiction, and the turns can be analyzed as a series of speech acts uttered by the individual characters. In the following passage, a discussion between Cromwell

2. The on-line *LION* corpus is divided into five literary periods: Renaissance 1500-1660, Neo-classical 1660-1785, Romantic 1780-1837, Victorian 1837-1901 and Modern 1899-1945. *LION* is a cumulative database, but according to the Version History section this applies mostly to criticism and reference resources, while the texts of the earlier collections have not been added to. *LION* is primarily aimed at literary scholars who use it to obtain copies of texts not otherwise accessible or difficult to obtain. The search engine provided by *LION* can be used to locate passages and topics with keywords, but for corpus linguistic purposes the software is not adequate, e.g. more refined searches with wild cards or key words in context and statistical assessments are not possible. The different literary periods of the Chadwyck-Healey database are also available on CD-ROM, and it is possible to use software developed for corpus linguistics with these texts, e.g. WordSmith or Corpus Presenter.

and Friskiball, Cromwell's speech begins with a speech act of thanking, then he apologizes for not accepting more favours, and thanks again. Thanking and apologizing alternate, they are not normally neighbouring speech acts but present a contrast, and together they form a strategy of interaction according to the norms of politeness of the period. As in the case of the Japanese guest (quoted by Cohen 1998: 81), who both thanks his host and simultaneously apologizes for the intrusion, Cromwell seems to be slightly embarrassed by the generosity of the gift, and therefore thanks the benefactor and apologizes for not accepting more at this moment. Thus, the passage displays a negotiation of interpersonal relations, with issues such as who is indebted and how much, and whether a return of favours is expected:

<p>(2) <i>Crom.</i> This unexpected favour at your hands, Which God doth know, if ever I shall requite it, Necessity makes me to take your bounty, And for your gold can yield you naught but thanks, Your charity hath help'd me from despair; Your name shall still be in my hearty prayer. <i>Fris.</i> It is not worth such thanks, come to my house, Your want shall better be reliev'd then thus. <i>Crom.</i> I pray excuse me, this shall well suf- fice, To bear my charges to <i>Bononia</i>, Whereas a noble Earl is much distressed: An Englishman, <i>Russel</i> the Earl of <i>Bedford</i> Is by the French King sold unto his death, It may fall out, that I may do him good: To save his life, I'll hazard my heart bloud: Therefore, kind sir, thanks for your liberal gift, I must be gone to aid him, there's no shift. (<i>LIONI</i>: Anonymous (Elizabethan): <i>Thomas Lord Cromwell</i> (1664)⁴, page 22)</p>	<p>Thanking Reason Explanations Humiliation of self Promise of reward Negation of the reason Promise for more favours Apology Reason Explanation Repair Commitment Thanks (Indirect apology)</p>
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3. This play has been attributed (probably erroneously) to Shakespeare. It was first printed in 1602.

<p>(4) Therefore I beseech you, to shroud this imperfect Pamphlet, vnder your Worships patronage: assuring my selfe that your Worships learned education, and vertuous disposition, will be a sufficient defence to protect me from the enuious tongues of the schorning Sico-phants, and hoping as <i>Iupiter</i> and his Sonne, vouchsafed to lie in <i>Philemons</i> poore Cottage: so I hope your Worship will excuse my slender skill, and except of my willing minde, and when you haue giuen them a fauourable view, with <i>Minerua</i> vnder your golden Target couer a deformed Owle, so hoping for more then yet I haue deserued, I rest: wishing you the happie successe of harts content, where I leaue you to the Heauens disposing. (<i>LIONI</i>: Bettie, W., <i>Titana, and Theseus</i> (1608), pages 2- 3)</p>	<p>Interpersonal plea Compliments (learned ref. to compliment the addressee)</p> <p>Apology Reason Compliments Wishes etc.</p>
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7. Forms of apologies in Renaissance prose fiction and prose drama

In Present-day English apologies are often one-word utterances of the form *sorry* or *pardon*. Deutschmann (2003: 53) calls these “detached apologies”, which he defines as apologies in which “the IFID alone constituted the utterance and there was no verbal reference made in the clause to the offence” (Deutschmann 2003: 52). Detached apologies often occur together with a “marker”, for instance with an interjection as in “Oh, sorry”, with a proper name as in “Sorry Bob”, with an intensifier as in “I do apologize”, or with *please* as in “Forgive me please”. In syntactically complex forms, the apology is embedded. It often takes a finite or infinite subordinate clause or a noun phrase as a complement, as in “I’m sorry about that”, “Pardon me for being so rude” or “We apologize if anyone’s been offended” (Deutschmann 2003: 53).

In our data of Renaissance prose and drama, we could not find any fully detached apologies. The examples quoted in section 6 above are typical: the apologies are preceded by interpersonal pleas *I pray*, *I beseech*, *I hope*, and followed by an explanation of the reason why. A few examples in our material appear more detached, even if they are still embedded in longer turns. Extracts (5) and (6) are relevant examples. The phrase *pardon me* is not entirely detached but it is an unexpanded form and the verb does not take a complement. In (6) the apology occurs together with two markers, an interjection and a term of address.

- (5) My dear, Deadora, I dye content, since I dye not unreveng'd: **Pardon me**, and suffer that the chastisement of a humane error may terminate with him who committed it: I beg of you, that with your disdain, you make not my ashes unhappy. (*LION*; Anon., *Choice Novels, and Amorous Tales: DEADORA*. (c. 1652), pages 158–159)
- (6) **O pardon me**, my dear Cloryana, and condemn thy too much credulity, and do not settle revenge on thy innocent Cleocreton. (*LION*; Anon., *Famous and Delectable HISTORY OF Cleocreton & Cloriana* (c. 1630), page 66)

More frequently, however, the apology is embedded in a more complex form. Example (7) expands the apology by giving the reason, i.e. bold behaviour in the past. In example (8) the apology *pardon me* is followed by an *if*-clause, which is common, and the apology is for something that has not yet been committed, an apology for a future offence.

- (7) Most gracious Princesse, how much I grieve to see your discomfort, J cannot say, but hope your Grace will **pardon me**, which have been more bold (presuming on your favour) then beseemeth me (*LION*; Anon., *Marianvs* Chap. XVII (c. 1641), page 159)
- (8) Honest man, I pray you **pardon me**, if I say any thing that may offend you (*LION*; Anon., *Pasqvils Iestes The Bakers doozen of Gulles. The fourth Gull, vpon a wager to hang himselfe* (c. 1604), page 41)

Excuse me also prefers an *if*-clause. Other apologies prefer other contexts. The phrase *I am sorry*, for instance, occurs with a complement clause, which is sometimes, but not always, introduced by the conjunction *that*. And the phrases *excuse my* or *forgive my* are followed by noun phrases. Extracts (9) and (10) are relevant examples.

- (9) and but I would not be counted vnciuill amongst these Gentlemen, I would giue you the reply that approued vntruth deserueth, you know my meaning, Sir: construe my words as you please: **excuse me**, Gentlemen, if I be vnciuill: I answere in the behalfe of one, who is as free from disloyaltie, as is the Sunne from darknes, or the fire from cold. (*LION*; Anon., *VVestward for Smelts* (c. 1620), page 13)
- (10) No more my Lord at this time, **I am sorry** that I have given you such cause of grieffe, thus by recounting so lamentable a state, to renew your passed griefes. But comfort good King, when Tydes be at the lowest, they spring againe. (*LION*; Anon., *Marianvs* (c. 1641), page 139)

The following example (11) shows a nominal construction, which is also common in our data:

- (11) Pardon, pardon my Lord Diphilus as thou art honourable, and thou Machaon, whose aged yeares I have so highly offended: **Forgive my** amisse and remit

that evill I have committed against thee, or let me never behold the dayes light againe. (*LION*; Anon., *Marianvs* (c. 1641), page [59], 47)

The inventory of syntactically complex forms is much smaller than Deutschmann's range of examples. But at the same time the apologies appear to be less routinized. The IFID in itself does not seem to be sufficient as an apology, but the apology is more explicit with explanations of the cause, address forms and IFIDs of other speech acts, such as requests and pleas, *I beseech you* and *I pray you*.

8. Functions of apologies: Types of offences

The classification of offences for which an apology is given proved to be far more difficult than the classification of the syntactic form. Nevertheless, some clear patterns can be discerned and they differ markedly from the Present-day English examples. Deutschmann (2003: 64) provides the following list of offences:

- A: Accidents, such as damage to property, hurting someone unintentionally, bumping into a person, and unintentionally being in the way
- B: Mistakes and misunderstandings
- C: Breach of expectations, such as declining offers, declining requests, and forgetting agreements
- D: Lack of consideration, such as interruptions, overlooking a person, and not paying attention
- E: Talk offences, such as slips of the tongue, digressions, hesitations, corrections, being unclear, or forgetting something
- F: Social gaffes, such as coughing, burping or sneezing
- G: Requests, such as requests for attention, asking someone to do something, or asking a person to move
- H: Hearing offences, such as not hearing, not understanding, not believing one's ears
- I: Offences involving breach of consensus, such as disagreeing, contradicting, reprimanding, refusing, denying, retaliating, insisting, challenging
- J: Unidentified

By far the most important categories are hearing offences (31.6 per cent) and lack of consideration (15.5 per cent). Each of the other offences occurred in less than 10 per cent of all cases.

For our small sample corpus we cannot provide meaningful statistics because the categories were not robust enough to survive any intercoder reliability tests (see Jucker et al. in this volume). But one category that is not listed by Deutschmann turned out to be particularly important. In our data people often apologize for a lack of decorum in their speech, for being too direct or for appearing to be rude or impolite.

- (12) **Excuse me**, Madam, if the Fervour of my desires have too amply enlarged my discourse. Let my Cordial affection weave an Apology for this presumption. Onely let me truly tell you, if your disposition bend that way, no Society shall ever answer your Content with more suitable Harmony. (*LION*; Brathwait, Richard, *Panthalia: OR, The Royall Romance* (1659), page [194], 187)
- (13) and after he had thundred foorth some threatning speches, he commanded him to discend, not so (good Uncle, saith he) vnlesse you will first sweare that you will **pardon me**, I telling you the truth of the matter, and otherwise, rather than I will sustaine your rigorous punishment, I will throw my selfe headlong from hence, and will take it vpon my death, that the very feare of your seueritie hath vrged me so to doe, answere you the lawe as you can. (*LION*; Anon., *Dobsons Drie Bobbes* (1607), page [67])
- (14) Honest man, I pray **you pardon me**, if I say any thing that may offend you; I am sorie to see the euil that is towards you: you haue bene very mery, but I feare, you will neuer be so againe in this company: for I see in your eyes a spirit of madnesse, which will very speedily bring you to your vnhappy ende: for indeede, within this houre, you will hang your selfe in the stable, vpon one of the great beames: (*LION*; Anon., *Pasqvils Iestes* (1609), page 41)

The speaker of (12) apologizes for the content of his speech. His own emotions, “the fervour of my desires” have presumably made the discourse longer than normal decorum allows. The speaker in (13) asks the addressee to pardon him in advance for telling the truth, and the speaker in (14) apologizes in advance for offending the addressee.

We hesitate to draw far-reaching conclusions from examples such as these. To modern ears it does not sound unduly strange to apologize for offending with stories that are tedious, too emotional, too long, unpleasantly true or offending. But it is probably significant that Deutschmann did not find it necessary to create a category for this type of offence and that it is so prevalent in our data of Renaissance prose. It may also be significant that *I am sorry to say* gave 117 hits in prose drama and 434 hits in prose fiction, while *I am sorry to hear* gave 61 and 122 hits respectively.

Another category not mentioned by Deutschmann is religious pleas and phrases in which God, Heaven, or abstract ideas are appealed to. Such phrases occur frequently with the verb *forgive* in our data, e.g. *God forgive me*, *God forgive me for saying so*, *gods forgive me*, *Heaven forgive me*, *forgive me Heaven*, *Love forgive me*, *Truth forgive me*, *forgive me piety*, etc. Such phrases may have functioned as mild swearing in a period not so remote from medieval conventions (see Taavitsainen 1997).

9. Addressee- and speaker-oriented apologies

The routinized and lexicalized apologies in our data express different orientations. The request to *pardon* or to *excuse* indicates an offence that is in need of the addressee's generosity, whereas the phrase *I am sorry* indicates that the speaker is sorry and expresses his/her feelings. In the Renaissance period, the second-person oriented apologies with imperative forms *pardon*, *excuse*, and *forgive* are more frequent than the self-oriented expressions, as the following numbers of absolute occurrences show: *pardon me/my* gave 1153 hits in prose drama and 178 in prose fiction; *excuse me/my* 431 and 87, *forgive me/my* 278 and four hits respectively, while *I am/m sorry* occurred 494 times in prose drama and 33 times in prose fiction.⁵ The two orientations belong to different politeness strategies.

An interesting parallel can be seen in the development of *pray* and *prithee* in Early Modern English to *please* in Present-day English. *Pray* and *prithee*, and the full forms of these expressions, *I pray you* and *I pray thee*, were used with requests in Early Modern English (see Kryk-Kastovsky 1998; Busse 1999). A request is a face-threat to the negative face of the addressee, i.e. to the addressee's desire to be unimpeded and to have his/her freedom of action (Brown and Levinson 1987). *Pray* or *prithee* do not directly address this face-threat but express the speaker's sincerity by encoding his/her wishes. Present-day English *please*, on the other hand, is addressed directly to the negative face-wants of the addressee ('if it pleases you'). It does not presume the addressee's willingness to cooperate and leaves it to the addressee's freedom to do so. In actual fact this freedom may be entirely superficial. The speaker may leave the addressee very little choice but to cooperate, but the linguistic expression pays at least token-respect to the negative face-wants of the addressee. This development, therefore, shows the increased importance of negative politeness. The negative face-wants of the addressee become more important and the speaker does not take his or her willingness to cooperate for granted.

The development of the apologies can be seen in a similar light. An apology is a face-threat to the speaker's own positive face since he/she acknowledges that an offence or a potential offence has taken place and that he/she is directly or indirectly responsible for this offence. In this case the addressee-centred expressions *pardon* and *excuse* are reduced in frequency in favour of expressions of the speaker's feelings, such as *I am sorry*, because *pardon* and *excuse* are also requests to the addressee to change his or her attitude, to show generosity and to forgive the offence perpetrated by the speaker. They presume that the addressee will cooperate and thus they involve a threat to the addressee's negative face-wants. Present-day speakers, it seems, often avoid this kind of imposition and apologize by expressing their own remorse without presuming or requesting any change of attitude on the part of the addressee. Thus the change from

5. *I am afraid* proved marginal for our study with very few and ambiguous examples expressing a state of mind rather than an apology.

addressee-centred apologies to more speaker-centred apologies can also be seen as a development to a higher level of negative politeness in Present-day English. Kopytko (1993, 1995) postulated a similar development from positive to negative politeness on the basis of his analysis of Shakespeare's plays. In these plays he found a striking predominance of positive over negative politeness strategies, and he concluded that "it may be tentatively proposed that the interactional style or 'ethos' of British society has evolved from the dominating positive politeness culture in the sixteenth century towards the modern negative politeness culture" (Kopytko 1995: 531).

10. Conclusion

An apology comprises the four components of offender, offended, offence and remedy. It is an acknowledgement by the offender that another person was or may have been offended by an offence for which the offender takes direct or indirect responsibility, and at least implicitly promises forbearance. Within these limitations, however, apologies vary considerably both synchronically between different speech communities and different languages and diachronically in the development of a particular language. In our data of Renaissance prose and drama, apologies show a fairly small inventory of syntactic forms, but all of them are embedded within larger syntactic structures. In the *BNC* dialogues investigated by Deutschmann (2003), on the other hand, many apologies are detached, i.e. they are not embedded in larger syntactic structures, and those that are embedded show a larger diversity of forms.

If our data of prose drama and prose fiction texts are comparable at all to Deutschmann's dialogues, it is significant that Renaissance speakers seem to apologize for different types of offences than Present-day speakers of English. In our Renaissance data, speakers apologize for a lack of decorum in their speech, for being too outspoken or for speaking above their social rank. And they ask God for forgiveness for various types of misdemeanours. In Deutschmann's Present-day English data, speakers apologize most frequently for hearing offences, such as not hearing or not understanding their interlocutor, and for a lack of consideration, such as interruptions, forgetting a name or being late (Deutschmann 2003: 64).

Apologizing behaviour is highly routinized in particular in Present-day English. It depends on a small range of lexical forms. This makes apologies particularly suitable for a corpus-based study because only conventionalized expressions are retrievable from large databases. Present-day apologies seem better suited for corpus searches than Renaissance apologies, though we believe that searches with the routinized lexical items yielded a representative sample of all manifestations, and our particular aim was to assess the predecessors of Present-day routinized expressions.

The most significant finding of this paper, however, is the fact that apologies show a development to a higher level of negative politeness in Present-day English. In our Renaissance prose and drama data, apologizers asked their addressees to show

generosity and forgive or overlook the perpetrated offence (*excuse me, pardon me*). In Deutschmann's Present-day data, apologizers more often indicate their remorse at the offence without explicitly requesting any generosity or forgiveness from the addressee (*I am sorry*). This is in line with the development from *pray* and *prithoe* in Early Modern English ('I pray you') in which speakers express their own desires, to *please* in Present-day English ('if it pleases you') in which speakers pay token respect to the addressee's negative face-wants of wishing to be unimpeded. Together with Kopytko's observations quoted above about a shift from a sixteenth-century positive politeness culture to the Present-day negative politeness culture, these conclusions are a strong indication that more research in this area is needed.

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Methods of speech act retrieval

Showing a little promise

Identifying and retrieving explicit illocutionary acts from a corpus of written prose

Petteri Valkonen

1. Introduction

Historically, most studies on speech acts – including the seminal work of Austin and Searle – have been based on introspection and the analysis of artificial examples, and, to date, only a handful of studies have utilised large computerised corpora to investigate the subject. This is partly due to the problem conceived by Myers, who made the observation in a talk given at the Corpus Linguistics Research Group at Lancaster University (Myers 1991, as cited in McEnery and Wilson 1996) that while pragmatics and discourse analysis rely on context, corpora strip away much of it: they tend to take smaller samples of texts rather than entire texts, and thus remove them from their original social and textual contexts.

This general problem is compounded in the context of speech act studies by the more specific problem of identifying and extracting instances of speech acts from corpora by means of concordancing programs. The problem stems from the fact that most of the illocutionary acts used in the English language lack a fixed linguistic form which could be used as the object of a concordance query. Greetings, for example, are usually realised by a fixed number of different manifestations, while other less formulaic speech acts such as requests, apologies and compliments are realised by an indefinite number of manifestations and are, therefore, considerably more difficult – if not entirely impossible – to identify using automated search techniques (Taavitsainen and Jucker 2007: 107).

2. Aim and method

This study aims to address the problem by developing a computerised method for identifying and retrieving explicit performative speech acts from a morphosyntactically unannotated machine-readable corpus of written English prose. As a case study, I shall use the speech act type of promises.

My hypothesis is that because explicit performatives only represent a very restricted set of realisations of speech acts occurring in a confined number of contexts¹, they can be described in terms of a small set of lexico-morphosyntactic patterns. After being identified on the basis of a small pilot study performed on a small corpus, these patterns can be used to identify new explicit performatives in a larger morphosyntactically unannotated corpus. As a starting point for identifying performative promises in the pilot corpus, a list of six performative verbs found in Wierzbicka's (1987) semantic dictionary of speech act verbs is used. A similar pattern-based approach was also adopted by Jucker, Schneider, Taavitsainen and Breustedt (this volume) for their corpus-driven study of compliments.

Because basic corpus analysis tools such as concordancers only operate on lexical items they are ill-suited to the investigation of more complex linguistic phenomena such as illocutionary acts. Thus, for the purpose of identifying and retrieving explicit performative promises from the corpus data more efficiently, a simple pattern-based retrieval program named *PatternExtractor* (PAX) was authored in the course of the study.

My methodology leverages on techniques developed in the fields of natural language processing (NLP), a subfield of artificial intelligence and linguistics which studies the problems inherent in the processing and manipulation of natural language, and information retrieval (IR), the goal of which is to develop algorithms for retrieving (textual) information from document repositories using automated, computer-based solutions.

As the results of the study will demonstrate, the automated identification and retrieval of speech acts from linguistically unannotated corpora remains a haphazard business. Although the retrieval software proved no panacea for the speech act scholar, the method pursued in this paper nevertheless offers a promising angle of attack on the problem.

3. Corpus-based studies of speech acts

The clear benefits offered by corpus-based methods have prompted scholars to embrace corpora and corpus linguistics as a viable method for the study of speech acts. Aijmer (1996), for example, studied thanking, apologies, requests and offers – all realised by a fairly limited number of speech act forms – in authentic modern-day English using the *London-Lund Corpus of Spoken English*. In fact, most of the work in this area has been carried out using the *London-Lund Corpus* not only because, for a time, it was the only major conversational corpus available, but also because most work in

1. As Wierzbicka (1987: 16) writes: “[O]ne does not boast by saying ‘I boast (that I am the best)’, or threaten people by saying ‘I threaten you (that if you don’t do X I’ll punch you)’. The primary function of speech act verbs consists in *interpreting* people’s speech acts, not in *performing* speech acts.”

pragmatics and related areas of research has generally concentrated on the study of spoken language (McEnery and Wilson 1996: 98).

As mentioned earlier, a significant portion of the canon of speech act research is based on elicited language, where the starting point for the research has been the function of the speech act, and its aim has been to investigate its form. Deutschmann's (2003) landmark thesis marks a clear break from the norm. Firstly, his study of apologising in British English is based solely on data gathered from the spoken part of the *British National Corpus*. Secondly, he turns the traditional research setting on its head: the object of his study was the form of the act rather than its function.

More recently, corpus-based methods have also attracted the attention of researchers working in the area of historical pragmatics. According to Jucker et al. (1999), English historical pragmatics has been at an advantage in comparison to German or Romance languages, since machine-readable corpora and other electronic tools in historical linguistics have been more readily available for English than for any other language. Given the catalytic effect of these resources, research in the field has been active and, during the past few years, a small number of studies using corpus-based approaches to explore the diachronic development of speech acts (see, e.g. Arnovick 1999; Jucker and Taavitsainen 2000; Kohnen 2000a, 2000b, 2007, this volume; Taavitsainen and Jucker 2007) and other constructions (e.g. Kohnen 2004) have appeared.

Although many problems related to both data and methodology were addressed at an early stage (see Culpeper and Kytö 2000; Bertucelli Papi 2000; Jucker and Taavitsainen 2000), those relating to corpus-based methodology still remain largely unsolved; as Kohnen (2007: 139) points out, in contrast to basic methodological issues, "the specific difficulties of a corpus-based study of the diachronic development of speech acts seem to have attracted less attention".

Like his colleagues working on speech acts in mainstream linguistics, Kohnen (2000a: 178) attributes these difficulties to the fact that, in speech acts, there does not exist a close link between form and function; the same speech act can be realised by different utterances in different contexts, making them hard to identify on the basis of formal patterns. Moreover, although tagging a corpus for speech acts would seem at first an attractive prospect, it would probably prove to be an intimidating task, since the tagging process would entail careful consideration of all available contextual factors, both intra- and inter-textual.

Kohnen goes on to state that, because corpus-based studies of speech acts must rely on clues offered by their linguistic form, the most explicit and reliable surface clue, the performative verb, will in most cases provide a key to unlock their identity.

4. The corpus data

The “raw material” for this study consists of two machine-readable corpora, namely the ARCHER corpus, or more specifically, *A Representative Corpus of Historical English Registers* and the Chadwyck-Healey *Eighteenth Century Fiction* database (ECF).

The ARCHER corpus was “compiled as a part of a project designed to investigate the diachronic relations among oral and literate registers of English between 1650 and the present” (Biber et al. 1994: 1). The corpus is designed as a balanced representation of various registers of both written and spoken British and American English across selected social situations over the Early Modern English period.

The British texts are organised into nine periods of fifty years each, starting from 1650 and ending at 1990. A number of American texts, constituting approximately one third of the corpus, were collected for three of the periods (1750–1799, 1850–1899 and 1950–1990). ARCHER contains texts in ten different “registers”, three of which are speech-based. The written registers range from the informal (“Journals-Diaries” and “Letters”) to the formal (“Legal opinions”, “Medical research articles” and “Science”). The middle ground is covered by “Fiction” and “News”. Similarly, the spoken registers range from “Fictional conversation” and “Drama” at the informal end of the scale to “Sermons-Homilies” at the other end.

In total, the ARCHER corpus (version 3.1, dated July 2006) consists of 1,789,309 running words in 955 texts. For each period, the corpus includes about 20,000 words per register. Individual texts are typically at least 2,000 words long, with the exception of some newspaper and scientific research articles from earlier periods; works of fiction, on the other hand, are typically much longer. No linguistic annotation has been applied to the corpus texts.

The Chadwyck-Healey *Eighteenth Century Fiction* database (1996) consists of works of English prose fiction from 1700 to 1780. The database contains the complete texts of 77 works by 30 writers from the British Isles, including, for instance, Defoe’s *Moll Flanders*, Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* and Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*.

The aim of the database is to provide a representative selection of texts from the eighteenth century. In addition to major authors of the period, works of lesser-known writers and female authors are also included to provide a more balanced sample. The database has approximately 12 million running words, and although all the texts have been marked up in SGML, no linguistic annotation has been applied.

The two corpora were used for different purposes: the ARCHER corpus serves as the training material for identifying prototypical patterns of explicit manifestations of

2. It should be noted here that Biber uses the term “register” in his later work as “the general cover term associated with all aspects of variation in use” (Biber 1995: 9), reversing his choice of the term “genre” in his earlier studies, where a “genre” was defined as a category assigned “on the basis of external criteria relating to the speaker’s purpose and topic; they are assigned on the basis of use rather than on the basis of form” (Biber 1988: 170).

performative promises, while the ECF database serves as testing material to verify the effectiveness of these patterns. However, instead of the entire corpus, only the “Drama” and “Fiction” registers of the ARCHER corpus were used for collecting data because these are similar in genre to the texts in the ECF database. Moreover, texts contained in both ARCHER and ECF were excluded from the training data, but included in the testing set. It should also be noted that while, ideally, only texts dating from the eighteenth century or belonging to the fiction genre would have been included in the training set, these yielded too few instances of explicit performative promises to be representative of the entire spectrum of possible manifestations. Therefore, all texts in the “Drama” and “Fiction” registers, irrespective of their date of publication, were included in the set. In total, the training set consisted of 197 texts and approximately 653,000 words.

5. Identifying prototypical promises

The starting point for identifying instances of performative promises in the training material was Wierzbicka’s semantic dictionary of speech act verbs (Wierzbicka 1987). Pursuing Austin’s (1962) idea of a dictionary of “verbs that act”, she classified over 250 English speech act verbs into 37 groups, including the groups “order”, “ask”, “call” and “forbid”. Each category contains a number of verbs related to the verb used as the category “headword”, thus the “order” category contains the verbs *command*, *demand*, *tell*, *direct*, *instruct*, *require* and *prescribe*. The verbs are categorised by means of definitions in the form of so-called “reductive paraphrases”, a few simple, descriptive sentences with a minimal and standardised lexicon, followed by a detailed discussion and clarification of the verb and paraphrase in question.

For the category of promises, Wierzbicka lists the verbs *promise*, *pledge*, *vow*, *swear*, *vouch for* and *guarantee*. When we promise to do something, we essentially say that we are going to do it, or as Searle (1969: 57) puts it, in promising, the speaker (S) “predicates a future act A of S”. Pledges and vows, on the other hand, are promises which are binding regardless of future circumstances. Pledging normally involves more than one person, while vowing is a purely private act. When we swear, we are declaring or affirming – often by God or things we consider holy – something as being solemnly and formally true. “To vouch for something”, in turn, means to guarantee the truthfulness of the thing being vouched for. Finally, “guaranteeing” means warranting or ensuring that something desirable will happen or has happened.

Instead of performing the corpus searches using the verbs in full, they were truncated in order to find the “stem” of each word which could then be used as a query term. After compiling the list of query terms, searches were performed using the *WordSmith* concordance software to find instances of explicit performative promises – that is to say, speech acts in which the performative verb belongs to Wierzbicka’s “promise” group – in the corpus data. The list of query terms used for the searches was:

PROMIS*, PLEDG*, VOW*, SWEAR*, SWORN, VOUCH*, GUARANTE*.³ The results of these queries were then analysed by hand in order to find performative instances of the speech act verbs.

In total, I found 60 instances of performative use of the aforementioned speech act verbs in the data. Of these instances, 24 were of *promise*, 14 of *vow*, 20 of *swear* and two of *guarantee*. No performative uses of *pledge* or *vouch for* were found in the data. Sentences which contained more than one performative verb in the utterance performing the illocutionary act (e.g. examples 3 and 10 below) were only counted once. The name and number in parenthesis after each example indicate the ARCHER corpus file and the word number of the query term in the file, as reported by *WordSmith*.

Example (1) below is an example of Austin's prototypical first person, present, indicative, active performative. This was by far the most common type of performative found in the data. Example (2) illustrates a minimal realisation of a performative promise, while examples (3) and (4) show the insertion of an adverb between the personal pronoun and the performative verb.

Lastly, example (5) demonstrates an act of illocutionary denegation (Searle and Vanderveken 1985: 4–5), the aim of which is to make explicit that point that the speaker is not performing a particular illocutionary act.

- (1) "It shall be found, sir – I **promise you** that if you will have a little patience it will be found."
(1902DOYL.F7B, 676)
- (2) *Captain* This is not YOUR Secret; will you promise?
Fanny And suppose I do not?
Captain Then I must obey orders, and mail it.
Fanny <After hesitating a moment, gives back letter> **I promise**.
(1871DALY.D6A, 1084)
- (3) And I **here promise**, nay, on my knees I swear not to write home or by any means divulge the true cause of my exportation, but do you all the service that lies in my power.
(1720PITT.F3B, 2428)
- (4) I **however promise** a reform, and am much pleased with my improvement.
(1789BROW.F4A, 143)
- (5) I **don't promise** a thing, but I can't be landed with Eva not coming.
(1944BAGN.D7B, 2056)

3. The word-final asterisk (*) at the end of each query term is a special wildcard character, used to represent zero or more "normal" characters. Although the stem *swear-* would not match the past tense form *swore*, this fact is of no consequence as the performative verb must always be in the present (non-past, non-future, non-perfect) tense. Likewise, the query term SWORN is added to match performatives in the passive (e.g. *I am (hereby) sworn to secrecy*).

The examples found for *swear* are similar to those of *promise* as, again, most constructions are of the “first person personal pronoun + present tense verb” type. Example (7) constitutes a hedged performative (see Fraser 1975), that is, an utterance where the naming of the illocutionary force is modified by some device such as a full or marginal modal auxiliary (e.g. *would, should, must, may, might* or *can*): here, the marginal modal *dare* has been added.

Example (8) presents an illocutionary conditional, a form of complex illocutionary act consisting of an illocutionary act and a stated condition for the performance of that act (Searle and Vanderveken 1985: 5). Hence, in (8), the illocutionary act is performed only on the condition that the speaker accepts the £1500.

- (6) No, **I swear** it Viola – I’ll love thee no more.
(1786COWL.D4B, 1577)
- (7) *Mrs. Candour* O fie! I’ll swear her colour is natural: I have seen it come and go.
Lady Teazle **I dare swear** you have, ma’am: it goes off at night, and comes again in the morning.
(1777SHER.D4B, 1691)
- (8) If you will not accept the fifteen hundred pounds, **I shall swear** you are too proud to love me.
(1851BOKR.D6A, 3739)

While example (9) is again of the canonical form, example (10) represents another type: in this case, the collocation *vow* and *swear* has been idiomatised⁴ to the point that its performative function has become somewhat dubious; that is to say, one cannot ascertain whether the expression is being used by the speaker as a performative or simply as a formulaic interjection:

- (9) To it, boys, **I vow** I’ll have a farm of my own that shall beat you all!
(1792BELK.F4A, 865)
- (10) **I’ll vow and swear**, Mr. Spendall, Knights presume no farther than to kiss the tip of my Daughter’s <Daughters> little Finger, and you make nothing of her Lips.
(1697PIX-.D2B, 2326)

4. Using mostly semantic criteria, Cruse (1986) establishes a continuum of idiomatity between “idioms” (“lexically complex” units, constituting a “single minimal semantic constituent”) and “collocations” (“sequences of lexical items which habitually co-occur”, each lexical item being a “semantic constituent”). The present collocates might, however, be thought to belong to a third category called “bound collocations” (expressions “whose constituents do not like to be separated”), introduced by Cruse as a “transitional area bordering on idiom” (Cruse 1986: 37-41).

Finally, the two instances of *guarantee* found in the training data are of the conditional and denegated variety:

- (11) Then **I could guarantee** your friend the complete extirpation of any class of inconvenient recollections she might desire removed, whether they were morbid or healthy; for since the great fact of the physical basis of the intellect has been established, I deem it only a question of time when science shall have so accurately located the various departments of thought and mastered the laws of their processes, the mental physician will be able to extract a specific recollection from the memory as readily as a dentist pulls a tooth, and as finally, so far as the prevention of any future twinges in that quarter are concerned.
(1880BELL.F6A, 2439)
- (12) **I don't guarantee** to get one of your fellows out of here alive.
(1962MANN.F8B, 1193)

On the basis of these results, the following patterns could be defined for use with the retrieval software:

1. first person personal pronoun + first person, present tense verb
2. first person personal pronoun + adverb + first person, present tense verb
3. first person personal pronoun + auxiliary verb + first person, present tense verb
4. first person personal pronoun + auxiliary verb + adverb + first person, present tense verb

The first pattern matches performatives of the (1), (2), (6) and (9) type, and the second of the (3) and (4) type. The third pattern matches performatives (7), (8), (10) and (11), while the fourth matches (5) and (12).

In order to evaluate the accuracy of the patterns, they were tested against the ECF database. First, each corpus file in the database (30 in total), consisting of one or more individual texts, was processed using PAX.

Before performing the queries based on the input patterns, the retrieval software first splits the corpus text into individual sentences and tokenises them (that is, splits each sentence into several tokens, where each is either an orthographic word or something else like a number or a punctuation mark). After tokenisation, the sentence is compared to the string of tokens in each pattern. If the sentence contains all the tokens of one (or more) of the input patterns, the program proceeds to part-of-speech tag it.⁵ Finally, the tagged sentence is checked against all the input patterns and if a match is found, the sentence is included in the result set.

Each set of results was then compared by hand against the original corpus file in order to determine both the program's (or more specifically, the patterns') accuracy

5. The tokenisation and part-of-speech tagging subtasks are performed using the free (libre) OpenNLP library, available at: <http://opennlp.sourceforge.net/>

and its ability to retrieve sentences relevant to the queries, viz. those sentences that contain instances of explicit performative promises. Finally, the program's performance was measured by calculating independent precision and recall rates and F-measure scores⁶ for each of the six verbs and four patterns.

6. Results and analysis

The manual examination of the testing material revealed a total of 563 examples of performative uses of the six speech act verbs under investigation, resulting in an overall frequency of 4.7 performatives per 100,000 words. The number of performative uses of the different speech act verbs that were present in the corpus texts (REL) are shown in Figure 1.

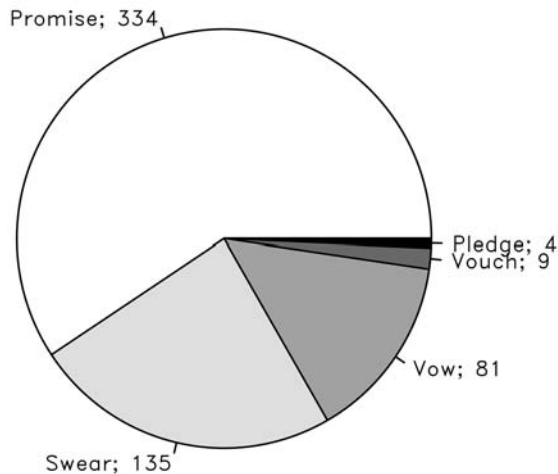


Figure 1. Performative verb frequencies in the testing data

As the figure illustrates, the relative frequencies of the performative verbs vary considerably. The most common performative verb in the testing material is, by a substantial

6. Information retrieval systems are often evaluated by measuring the relevance of the documents returned as the result of a query. The relevance of a document is determined by a judgement by a human that a given document is relevant to a specific query (Jurafsky and Martin 2000: 652). The basic metrics employed in the evaluation of the performance of IR systems are precision and recall, which measure the system's accuracy and its ability to retrieve relevant documents, respectively. Precision and recall are often combined into a single measure of overall retrieval performance such as the F-measure. For more rigorous definitions of these metrics, see, for example, van Rijsbergen (1979).

margin, *promise*, with a total of 334 instances found across all the texts. The second most frequent is *swear* with 135 instances and the third *vow* with a total of 81 instances. *Vouch* and *pledge* are the most infrequent with nine and four matches respectively. What is especially striking about the frequency distribution is that the three most frequent verbs cover 97.6 per cent of all instances. The absolute frequencies (per 100,000 words) of the different performative verbs in both the training (ARCHER) and testing (ECF) materials are shown in table 1 and table 2.

Table 1. Performative verb frequencies in the training data

Verb	REL	<i>f</i> (per 100,000 words)
Promise	24	3.672
Pledge	0	0
Swear	20	3.06
Vouch	0	0
Vow	14	2.142
Guarantee	2	0.306
Total	60	9.181

Table 2. Performative verb frequencies in the testing data

Verb	REL	<i>f</i> (per 100,000 words)
Promise	334	2.811
Pledge	4	0.033
Swear	135	1.136
Vouch	9	0.075
Vow	81	0.681
Guarantee	0	0
Total	563	4.739

While performatives are found nearly twice as frequently in the training data as in the testing data, the frequencies of the three most common performative verbs are, however, of similar magnitude. It would therefore seem quite likely that the performative function would, at least in the case of eighteenth century fictional texts, be restricted to a small set of common speech act verbs.

Pledge and *vouch*, on the other hand, are absent in the training data, but they are represented, albeit in small numbers, in the testing material. Their absence in the training data does not, however, come as a great surprise given their low frequencies in the testing set.

Likewise, while *guarantee* was present in the training set, no instances were found in the performative function in the testing material. This absence can probably be explained by the fact that the verbal sense of *guarantee* was, according to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, only first attested in writing as late as 1791, and had thus not yet entered common usage. (The presence of *guarantee* in the training data is, of course, explained by the inclusion of texts from later dates.)

Although one might expect that each performative verb would be used quite uniformly throughout the genre, different verbs seem to be utilised by individual authors quite disproportionately, as is illustrated by figure 2. Certain authors tend to use performatives very frequently, while others do not use them at all. Henry Fielding, for instance, seems to favour *promise*, while Samuel Richardson uses *promise*, *swear* and *vow* more evenly. At the other end of the scale lie Sarah Robinson Scott and Jonathan Swift, whose texts do not include any explicit performatives. This disparity could arguably be attributed to the idiosyncrasies of individual authors or even to differences between the plots of the narratives themselves, but this hypothesis is hard to prove without in-depth textual analysis, which – regrettably – falls outside the scope of this study.

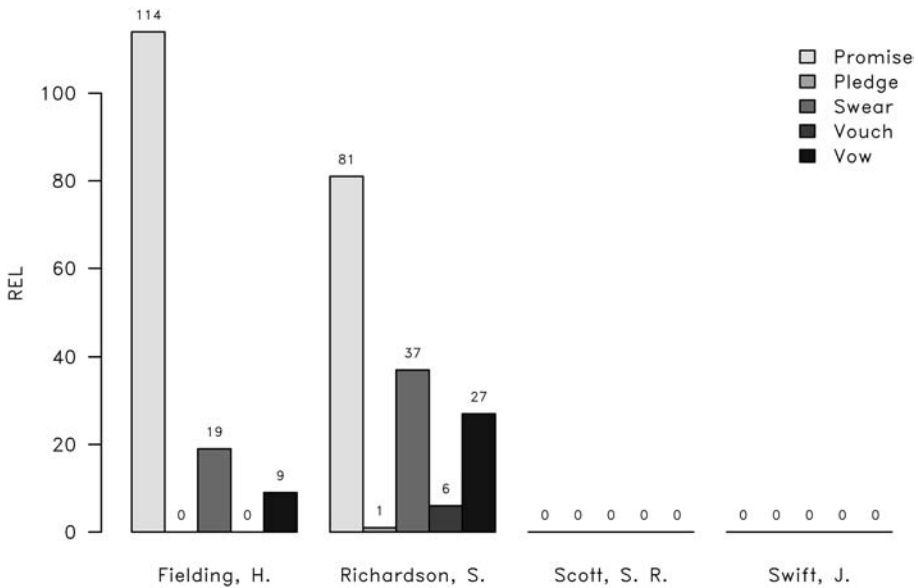


Figure 2. Performative verb frequencies by author

The relative frequencies of the different patterns of performative use are shown in figure 3. The most frequent of these is the prototypical “first person personal pronoun +

present tense verb” (PRP+VBP⁷) pattern with 327 instances and the second most frequent is the “first person personal pronoun + auxiliary verb + first person, present tense verb” (PRP+MD|VBP+VB|VBP) pattern with 142 items. These two patterns account for 83.3 per cent of all items in total. The other three patterns have approximately equal frequency with between 20 and 38 instances each.

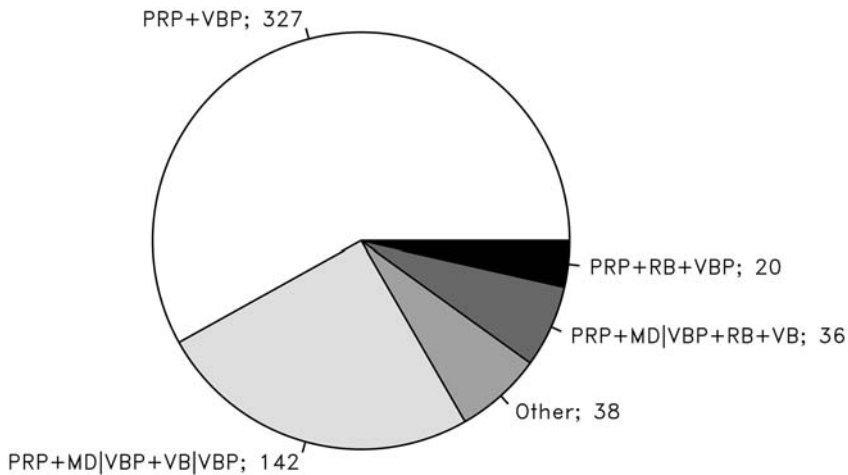


Figure 3. Pattern frequencies in the testing data

As can be discerned by examining figure 4, performatives centred around *promise* are most often realised using the PRP+VBP pattern, PRP+MD|VBP+VB|VBP being the second most popular. The frequency distributions of *swear* and *vow* are similar to that of *promise*. Again, the two most common patterns are PRP+VBP and PRP+MD|VBP+VB|VBP, with the difference that, for *swear*, the latter is more frequent than the former. *Pledges*, by contrast, are realised by PRP+VBP and PRP+MD|VBP+VB|VBP, while *vouch* is realised by the more complex PRP+MD|VBP+VB|VBP and PRP+MD|VBP+RB+VB patterns. All verbs except *vouch* also include a number of instances realised by previously unseen patterns belonging to the “Other” category (these are discussed further in section 7).

7. PRP and VBP are Penn Treebank part-of-speech tags (for a full list, see Appendix A) understood by the retrieval program, while the | operator is shorthand for the Boolean OR operator familiar from Internet search engines and corpus analysis tools. This technical notation is used for the sake of brevity.

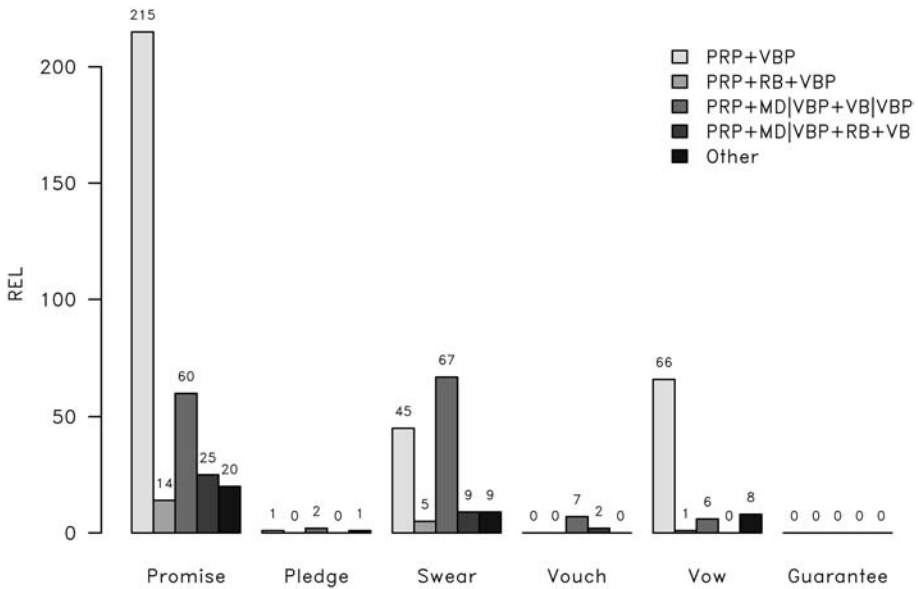


Figure 4. Pattern frequencies by performative verb

Notice that the PRP+VBP pattern matches both first person singular (13), (14), (15) and plural (16), (17) personal pronouns. Example (18), in turn, represents an example of a strongly idiomatised expression typical for *vow*, already familiar from the training data.

- (13) **I promise you**, Sir, said the King, that I shall not be ungrateful, and that you shall have no Cause to repent your having entrusted me with your Recipe.
(BROOKEH.GRP, 274⁸)
- (14) A thousand pounds will I order to be paid into your hands for a present before the week is out; **I pledge** my honour for the payment; if you will but save me from a violence, that no worthy woman can see offered to a distress'd young creature!
(RICHARDS.GRP, 219)
- (15) **I swear** by our Prophet and the God of our Prophet, that I would rather suffer the Gaunch, than put the smallest Constraint on your Person or Inclinations.
(BROOKEH.GRP, 320)
- (16) And Isaac tells Mrs. Jervis, that the Ladies will by-and-by come to see the House, and have the Curiosity to see me; for it seems, they said to my Master, when the Jokes flew about, Well Mr. B—, we understand that you have a

8. Because of technical limitations, in examples referring to the ECF database, the number listed next to the name of the corpus file denotes the paragraph in which the given example was found, instead of the exact word number as in the ARCHER examples.

Servant-maid, who is the greatest Beauty in the County; and **we promise** ourselves to see her before we go.

(RICHARDS.GRP, 58)

- (17) Your Secret is yet with us; and, **we swear** to you, by our holy Prophet, and by the terrible Alha, that if you perform the single Condition we enjoy, we will bury what we know, in a Depth below the Grave, and we will recommend you to the Love of Ali, and the Acclamations of all the People, and we will have you loaded with Preferments, and Riches, and Honours.

(BROOKEH.GRP, 213)

- (18) The doctor got up also, saying, “**I vow and protest**, upon my word, I am actually amazed.” – and followed Mr. Medlar to the bar, which was hard by, where he was paying for the coffee; there he whispered so loud that I could overhear, “Pray, who is this gentleman?”

(SMOLLETT.GRP, 96)

Furthermore, since the pattern matches the smallest possible group of elements (i.e. just the personal pronoun and the performative verb), sentence order is not significant: the sentences below are matched even though the modifying adverb follows the personal pronoun *you* and not the performative verb as in (19), or, in the case of (20), when the modifying adverbial phrase precedes the pronoun and performative verb. For the same reason, the pattern also matches sentences which contain previously unseen personal pronouns, such as *thee* in example (21) and *un* (‘him’) in (22).

- (19) **I promise you faithfully**, you shall one Day know; but I am under the most solemn Ties and Engagements of Honour, as well as the most religious Vows and Protestations, to conceal his Name at this Time.

(FIELDINH.GRP, 40)

- (20) And **most solemnly do I swear**, that Miss Howe shall come in for her snack.

(RICHARDS.GRP, 124)

- (21) For att in a devilish Pickle, **I promise thee**.

(FIELDINH.GRP, 216)

- (22) Od rabbit it, he should have taken a Dance thru the Horse-pond, **I promise un**.

(FIELDINH.GRP, 36)

Examples (19), (21) and (22) above each exemplify what Traugott and Dasher (2002: 206) dub the “formulaic epistemic parenthetical construction *I promise you*”. When the construction follows the main clause, as in examples (21) and (22), it is non-commissive and serves mainly as an assurance or a hedge. If the parenthetical precedes the main clause without a complementiser (a conjunction which marks a complement clause), as in (19), it often serves as a comment on the utterance that follows it. According to Traugott and Dasher, in both the sentence-initial and sentence-final positions,

the construction presumably serves interpersonal functions, introducing something that the speaker thinks might be surprising, or even insulting to the hearer, and wants to let them know it has been recognized as such.

Examples (23), (24), (25) and (26) below show typical performatives matched by the “first person personal pronoun + adverb + first person, present tense verb” (PRP+RB+VBP) pattern. This simple pattern can also match more complex types of performatives: example (27) illustrates a hedged illocutionary conditional, where the speaker almost promises to believe something if the hearer can come up with an acceptable excuse.

- (23) Well, Madam, said Formator, when I see you in the Arms of Alanthus, **I faithfully promise**, you shall dispose of Formator as you please.
(DAVYS.GRP, 108)
- (24) But – should they reject my Suit, **I again swear**, by Alla, to send You to them, laden with Wealth, though I myself should drop dead at the Instant of your Departure.
(BROOKEH.GRP, 322)
- (25) **I now swear** it over-again to thee – ‘Were her death to follow in a week after the knot is tied, by the Lord of Heaven, it shall be tied, and she shall die a Lovelace.’
(RICHARDS.GRP, 322)
- (26) She turned towards me, and with a spirited action catching me by the hand, If I am permitted, Madam, said she, to decline my lord V-’s alliance, you will find I shall justify the opinion you are so good as to have of me; for **I here promise** you, that however I may be impelled by inclination, (for I will not pretend to answer for my own heart) I will never transgress the duty I owe you.
(SHERIDAN.GRP, 19)
- (27) If you can forge an Excuse, **I almost promise** you to believe it.
(FIELDINH.GRP, 262)

As might be expected, the “first person personal pronoun + auxiliary verb + first person, present tense verb” (PRP+MD|VBP+VB|VBP) pattern matched a number of hedged performatives, marked by the use of various modal auxiliaries, including *would* (28), *should* (29), *may* (30) and *can* (31). The most common auxiliary is, however, *will*, found either in its full (32), (33), (34) or contracted form (35) and (36).

The relative commonness of *will* and conversely, the rarity of *shall*, can be explained by the semantic shift of *shall* and *will* from chiefly deontic meanings in Old English to primarily epistemic meanings in Modern English. For *will*, the notion of pure futurity displaces that of determination in Early Modern English. The Modern English *shall*, on the other hand, loses its sense of obligation and becomes a purely suppletive form of the neutral *will* (Arnovick 1999: 64).

- (28) I told them, if they would set me on any Shore thereabouts, from whence I might travel by Land, or get Shipping to Canada, **I would promise** if I lived to return to France, to remit a thousand Pistoles to any Part of the World, or Person they should name; they took little Notice of my Offers, but let us have the liberty of walking in the Day-time on the Decks, and at Night they put us under Hatches.
(AUBIN.GRP, 60)
- (29) “Upon my Soul,” said he, “**I should swear** she had been bred in a Court; for besides her Beauty, I never saw any thing so genteel, so sensible, so polite.”
(FIELDINH.GRP, 202)
- (30) I believe, my dear, **I may promise** myself your approbation, whenever I write or speak with spirit, be it to whom it will.
(RICHARDS.GRP, 120)
- (31) Indeed, rejoin’d miss Wingman, **I can vouch for** my sister’s sincerity in this point; sir Robert has made mr. Lovegrove and lord Huntley the confidants of his passion; and I believe you will very soon hear it from his own mouth.
(HAYWOOD.GRP, 215)
- (32) “If all your fear be of apparitions, said the prince, **I will promise** you safety: there is no danger from the dead; he that is once buried will be seen no more.”
(JOHNSON.GRP, 41)
- (33) **I will vow** to you, that I will never suffer myself to be engag’d without your Approbation.
(RICHARDS.GRP, 287)
- (34) He is warm too; and from the short knowledge I have of him, **I will pledge** myself for his veracity:
(WALPOLE.GRP, 140)
- (35) “Besides,” said the son, “**I’ll promise** you a pot of beer for my own share.”
(BURNEY.GRP, 217)
- (36) **I’ll swear** it, said the Man delivering it to her.
(LENNOX.GRP, 182)

Finally, items matched by the “first person personal pronoun + auxiliary verb + adverb + first person, present tense verb” (PRP+MD|VBP+RB+VB) pattern, such as (37) and (38), are typically acts of illocutionary denegation, the speaker making explicit that she is not performing the illocutionary act denoted by the performative verb. The pattern is not, however, only limited to acts of illocutionary denegation, but also matches hedged performatives which exhibit a modal auxiliary and an adverb modifying the performative verb, as example (39) illustrates.

- (37) And to make you some Amends for the Mortification I have given you, by rejecting your Advocacion in Behalf of your Friend, I here engage never to

marry without your Approbation, though I **do not promise**, Sir, that you shall dictate to my Choice.

(BROOKEH.GRP, 17)

- (38) Well [said the half yielding Nymph] I am ashamed to think how tender my poor Heart is, which would not so readily soften into a Compliance, but that I have a Mind to hear what you can say for yourself; so if we must Dine together, tell me where, and may be, I may come, but I **won't promise** neither.
(DAVYS.GRP, 109)

- (39) I must ask nothing of you; but, for myself, I **can only promise**, in the words of the Chevalier Grandison, to endeavour to forego, a dearer, the dearest, hope.
(RICHARDS.GRP, 196)

7. Retrieval software performance

Based on the training material, the retrieval software achieved an overall precision rate of 91.1 per cent and an overall recall of 72.8 per cent, resulting in a weighted F_2 -measure⁹ of 0.607. The precision and recall figures for each of the six performative verbs are listed in table 3 below.

Table 3. Precision and recall rates for performative verbs

Verb	N	rel	REL	Precision	Recall	F_2 -Measure
Promise	330	300	334	0.909	0.898	0.678
Pledge	2	2	4	1	0.5	0.5
Swear	102	93	135	0.912	0.689	0.589
Vouch	10	9	9	0.9	1	0.711
Vow	6	6	81	1	0.074	0.103
Guarantee	0	0	0	N/A	N/A	N/A

While the precision figures for all of the verbs were very high, with all achieving at least 90 per cent precision, the recall rates of some verbs – namely *swear* and *vow* – proved sub-par at best. The high rate of type I errors (false negatives) associated with these

9. Using a weighted measure in performance evaluation is useful when either precision or recall is considered to be more important than the other. For instance, if a human were to perform further classification of the results of a query – as is the case in the present study – high recall would be more desirable than high precision. Likewise, if an automatic information retrieval system is to operate without human supervision, high precision is at least as important a feature as high recall. The F_2 -measure weights recall twice as high as precision ($\alpha = 2$).

verbs can be explained by a number of systematic tagging errors related to certain performative constructions.

The verb *swear*, when co-occurring with the verb *do* or a (semi-)modal verb, is often erroneously tagged as common noun (NN). Sentences containing the construction *I do/dare swear* (examples 40, 41 and 42 below) are repeatedly tagged as PRP+VBP+SWEAR_NN. Similarly, sentences exhibiting the pattern PRP+MD|VBP+RB+SWEAR_VB, such as (43) and (44) are systematically tagged as PRP+MD+RB+SWEAR_NN.

- (40) I **do swear** it, said the Regent, provided the Discovery which you make shall be found of due Import.
(BROOKEH.GRP, 200)
- (41) “A fig for the silver rims,” cried my wife, in a passion: “I **dare swear** they won’t sell for above half the money at the rate of broken silver, five shillings an ounce.”
(GOLDSMIT.GRP, 119)
- (42) Thy true father, I **dare swear**, was a butcher, or an undertaker, by the delight thou seemest to take in scenes of horror and death.
(RICHARDS.GRP, 193)
- (43) ‘But, Sir,’ says Booth, ‘I had a Letter given me by a noble Colonel there, which is written in a Hand so very like yours, that I **could almost swear** to it.’
(FIELDINH.GRP, 39)
- (44) ‘These I **can safely swear** were the very Words he spoke.’
(FIELDINH.GRP, 233)

Vow, on the other hand, is likely to be tagged either as a past tense verb (VBD) when found as a part of the prototypical *I vow* construction, as in (45) and (46), or as a present participial/gerund (VBG) when coupled with a modal (examples 47 and 48).

- (45) “I **vow**, my dear sir,” returned he, “I am amazed at all this; nor can I understand what it means! I hope you don’t think your daughter’s late excursion with me had any thing criminal in it.”
(GOLDSMIT.GRP, 79)
- (46) His face grew pale, his teeth chattered, and his eyes flashed—“Sister, (cried he, in a voice like thunder) I **vow** to God, your impertinence is exceedingly provoking.”
(SMOLLETT.GRP, 35)
- (47) I was denied to him indeed the next time he came; but we contrived two or three short interviews at the rooms: and I told him, ‘that although I could not think of disobeying my mother’s express commands; I **would vow** eternal

constancy to him, and promise faithfully never to give my hand, much less my heart, to any other.’

(GRAVES.GRP, 288)

- (48) As to the ornaments you speak of, I hope I shall always look upon simplicity of manners a grateful return to the man **I shall vow** to honour, and a worthy behaviour to all around me, as my principal ornaments!

(RICHARDS.GRP, 182)

While the tagging errors related to *vow* could arguably be considered less “serious” than those of *swear* in that they apply to two subcategories of the same part of speech, they nevertheless have a tangible effect on the recall rate because they often occur in the case of the relatively common *I vow* construction. This adverse effect is especially pronounced in texts where the author’s (Henry Fielding and Samuel Richardson, for instance) writing style dictates the use of these forms.

In addition to the considerable number of type I errors caused by tagging mistakes, recall errors were also caused by other factors including previously unseen patterns and complex sentence structures (both of which are discussed in more detail below). Furthermore, exactly one sentence which contained a previously unseen performative verb, a variant of *vow* (49), and one sentence with a passive performative (50), both classifiable as false negatives, were found in the data.

- (49) **I re-vow** it, at your feet!

(RICHARDS.GRP, 246)

- (50) If miss and master are good, **she is promised** a rich husband, and a coach and six, and he a wife with a monstrous great fortune.

(BROOKEH.GRP, 69)

Most of the type II errors (false positives) found in the results are related to “non-performative” sentences – that is to say, sentences which, although they contain the matched expression, are not direct speech and in which the verb is, therefore, not used in a performative function. These include first-person narrative (51) and interrogative (52) sentences and reported speech (53):

- (51) Our little plan was, that I should get out about seven the next morning, (which **I could readily promise**, as I knew where to get the key of the streetdoor) and he would wait at the end of the street with a coach, to convey me safe off; after which he would send and clear any debt incurr’d by my stay at Mrs. Brown’s, who he only judg’d, in gross, might not care to part with one, he thought, so fit to draw custom to the house.

(CLELAND.GRP, 97)

- (52) Nay, don’t say no, you Fool; Did not **I promise** to put you to-Bed to him?

(DEFOE.GRP, 52)

- (53) I told him **we would promise** all that; then he pointed to the Sun, and clapt his Hands, signing to me, that I should do so too, which I did; at which all the Prisoners fell flat on the Ground, and rising up again, made the oddest, wildest Cries that ever I heard.
(DEFOE.GRP, 80)

Another class of false positives is represented by sentences in which the semantic meaning of the verb is different from the meaning used in the performative function. In example (54), *swear* is used in the sense ‘to curse; to utter obscenities or profanities’, while in (55), *vouch* is used in the sense ‘to allege, assert, affirm or declare’.

- (54) The Gentleman grew good humour’d at the Reproof, and said, well come don’t go away, **I won’t swear** any more, says he, if I can help it, for I own, say he, I should not do it.
(DEFOE.GRP, 76)
- (55) I think I never shewed suspicion of my friends; and why to this lovely one, the delicacy of whose virtue **I would vouch** against the world, should I be more unjust than to others?
(MACKENZI.GRP, 76)

The individual precision and recall figures for the five different patterns are shown in table 4. Predictably, a pattern’s precision is inversely proportional to its complexity: the most accurate pattern in terms of precision is the prototypical PRP+VBP pattern with a score of 98.9 per cent, while the most complex and least precise is the four-token PRP+MD|VBP+RB+VB pattern with a 77.1 per cent precision rate.

Table 4. Precision and recall rates for query patterns

Query Pattern	N	rel	REL	Precision	Recall	F ₂ -Measure
PRP+VBP	266	263	327	0.989	0.804	0.665
PRP+RB+VBP	20	19	20	0.95	0.95	0.713
PRP+MD VBP+VB VBP	129	101	142	0.783	0.711	0.559
PRP+MD VBP+RB+VB	35	27	36	0.771	0.75	0.57
Other	0	0	38	N/A	0	N/A

The high precision of the PRP+VBP pattern is not surprising given the fact that the pattern consists of only two tokens of which only one can vary (the verb token remains constant), thus making it less susceptible to tagging errors. Furthermore, because of the first person reference of the pronoun and present tense of the verb, sentences matched by this pattern are more likely than not to be direct speech and hence performative. The pattern’s less impressive recall of 80.4 per cent, on the other hand, can be largely credited to the systematic mistagging of the *I vow* construction described above.

In terms of examining just the bare precision and recall rates, the most accurate pattern overall was PRP+RB+VBP with a F_2 -measure of 0.713; the 5 per cent decrease in both precision and recall being caused by a single mistagged instance of the expression *I solemnly vow*. However, based on the small number of matches, it would be premature to conclusively label the pattern as the most accurate.

In comparison, the poor precision rates of the two more complex patterns (PRP+MD|VBP+VB|VBP and PRP+MD|VBP+RB+VB) are, again, chiefly attributable to the systematic mistagging of *swear* and *vow* in the conjunction of modal verbs. Moreover, since these patterns are the most likely to match “non-performative” sentences (see above), their recall rates also suffer as a result.

Finally, the “Other” category encompasses all explicit performatives not covered by the four given patterns, including sentences exhibiting previously unseen patterns and complex or untypical sentence structures. The patterns not found in the ARCHER training data are in essence variations of the patterns identified in section 5. These new patterns basically consist of the same tokens as the earlier patterns but in different quantities, sometimes also including additional punctuation (56) or employing the *to*-infinitive (57). Examples (58) and (59) demonstrate a variation of the PRP+RB+VBP pattern where the performative verb is preceded by two qualifying adverbs (*here* and *faithfully* or *solemnly*), while (60) also adds the primary verb *do*.

- (56) I have loved you long, my Arabella, and the frequent Visits, I pay'd, are to be placed to your Credit, and not to that of the stupid Politics, with which I amused your Husband, and now, my Angel, if you will make any Concession, but the slightest Return to the Excess of my Passion and Fondness for you; **I, here, vow** to you perpetual Faith and Constancy for Life, and, both my Fortune and Person shall be, wholly, devoted to you.
(BROOKEH.GRP, 282)
- (57) As to the matter in question, if your Ladyship pleases to employ me in it, **I will venture to promise** you Success.
(FIELDINH.GRP, 186)
- (58) Aye Child [return'd Belinda] the sound is well enough, but if the Man that gives us the Honour is nothing but sound himself, in my Opinion one had as good be tied to a Drum, and for giving you Sir Combish, I am very glad it is not in my Power, for I never give away any Thing but what's my own, and **I here faithfully promise** I will never have a Title either to him or from him while I live.
(DAVYS.GRP, 117)
- (59) If therefore your Thoughts of my Daughter be not changed, and you esteem her worthy to be your Bride, **I here solemnly promise** you to bestow her upon you, as soon as you are perfectly recovered.
(LENNOX.GRP, 113)

- (60) **I do most solemnly vow**, Madam
(RICHARDS.GRP, 256)

Performative sentences with complex or untypical structures are difficult, if not impossible, to identify using a simple pattern-based approach like the method used by PAX. While example (61), which demonstrates a variation of the PRP+VBP pattern with inverted subject-verb word order, could be identified by including the pattern VBP+PRP in the program's pattern list, this approach would ultimately prove too unwieldy if we wanted to cover all possible permutations of each pattern. Meanwhile, examples (62) and (63) below illustrate performative sentences which, due to their complex structures, are altogether unidentifiable without the aid of some form of higher-level syntactic parsing used to determine the intra-sentential relationships of the various constituent clauses. In some cases, it might even be necessary to examine the wider inter-sentential context in which the performative sentence is situated in order to discover its meaning.

- (61) To be short, my Lord, this raging Passion was like to vanquish my Reason; but no longer to put it in my own Power to do an Action that would dishonour me by its Weakness, and procure me a whole Life's Repentance, a Thought came into my Head, which as soon as it was born, I put in Execution; you may guess at the height of my Disease, by the Violence of its Cure; it was this, to take Holy Orders, and engage my self to the Church, by which **Vow I** for ever incapacitated my self to marry, without the Penalty of being burnt alive.
(MANLEY.GRP, 56)
- (62) I do, answered he, solemnly addressing himself to Mr. Faulkland, and **swear** by all my hopes of happiness hereafter, to act in conjunction with Mr. Warner in every particular that he has promised.
(SHERIDAN.GRP, 292)
- (63) I hope so too, Sir, said I, and do here in my turn **promise**, I will never dispose of myself while you live, without your Approbation and Consent; for I can with much more pleasure deny the Man I love, than take the Man I loath.
(DAVYS.GRP, 142)

8. Conclusions

This study set out to devise a computerised method for identifying and retrieving explicit performatives, namely promises, from a morphosyntactically unannotated machine-readable corpus of written English prose in the hope of reducing the amount of time-consuming manual work required to conduct corpus-based studies of speech acts using existing computerised tools. To this end, a simple pattern-based retrieval program was authored.

My premise was that because explicit performatives only represent a very restricted set of realisations of speech acts (most illocutionary acts are implicit) occurring in a confined number of contexts, they could be described in terms of a small set of lexico-morphosyntactic patterns. Having formulated these patterns based on a small pilot study performed on a “training” corpus, they were then entered into the retrieval program, which, in turn, could use them to identify performative promise candidates in the larger “testing” corpus.

Based on the patterns composed on the basis of the pilot study performed using the ARCHER corpus, the retrieval software achieved an overall precision of 91.1 per cent and an overall recall of 72.8 per cent, resulting in a F_2 -measure of 0.607 for the ECF database. Although the precision rate of the software was good, accuracy being reduced primarily by a number of “non-performative” sentences, and sentences in which the verb’s semantic meaning differed from the meaning used in the performative function, its recall proved less acceptable. The reasons for the poor recall of the system lie in a number of systematic tagging errors related to certain performative constructions as well as the discovery of a set of previously unseen patterns not present in the training data.

My results mirror those of Jucker, Schneider, Taavitsainen and Breustedt (this volume), who also experienced problems with both precision and recall in their corpus searches, their otherwise promising results being marred by the problem of formulating precise, yet efficient, query patterns to cover a plethora of surface forms.

As far as unseen patterns are concerned, it is important to realise that the results of the study are only as good as the training material; the results can suffer significantly if all the relevant manifestations are not identified during the training phase. This implies not only the careful selection of the training material, but also the researcher’s own intuition: she must be able to account even for forms that are not present in the training set, but which could plausibly occur in the actual application text.

In terms of the automatic identification and retrieval of explicit performatives, poor precision is less significant than poor recall because while impertinent material can easily be discarded by hand, “it is generally impossible for the analyst to know what has been missed without analysing the entire corpus by hand” (Ball 1994: 295). Therefore, it is easy to agree with Gilquin, who – on the basis of the results of her pilot study on causative structures with *make* in the *Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen* corpus – concludes that even though the recall rate of an automated retrieval system might not be reliable enough for quantitative analysis, it is, however, often quite adequate for qualitative research, “as all the instances retrieved are authentic structures, whose careful investigation is bound to bring out interesting tendencies, as well as counterexamples to some claims made in the literature” (Gilquin 2002: 206).

Although the results of the present study would seem to indicate that the current implementation of the retrieval software would be best suited to qualitative research, they did, nevertheless, verify my initial hypothesis. The data seems to indicate that explicit performatives are indeed realised by a finite set of manifestations; of the 563

explicit performatives identified in the testing set, 525 instances (93.3 per cent) were matched by the four prototypical patterns composed on the basis of the training corpus. These results are promising for future research: other studies on explicit illocutionary acts could also utilise the methodology adopted for this study and quite likely achieve similar results.

As this study has demonstrated, the study of speech acts within the field of corpus linguistics is by no means an easy task. Because of their indeterminate linguistic form and the limitations imposed by traditional corpus analysis tools, the identification of speech acts in large corpora is exceedingly laborious and error-prone. While the results of this study certainly show great promise by indicating that it is, indeed, possible to identify and retrieve explicit performatives from morphosyntactically unannotated corpora with acceptable accuracy, current methods offer little guarantees; the fully automated identification and retrieval of explicit illocutionary acts without any manual intervention still remains an elusive goal.

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Appendix A: Penn Treebank part-of-speech tagset

Listed alphabetically, below, are the standard tags used in the Penn Treebank as described in Marcus et al. (1993).

Tag	Description	Tag	Description
CC	Coordinating conjunction	TO	To
CD	Cardinal number	UH	Interjection
DT	Determiner	VB	Verb, base form
EX	Existential there	VBD	Verb, past tense
FW	Foreign word	VBG	Verb, gerund/present participle
IN	Preposition/subord.	VBN	Verb, past participle
JJ	Adjective	VBP	Verb, non-3rd ps. sing. present
JJR	Adjective, comparative	VBZ	Verb, 3rd ps. sing. present
JJS	Adjective, superlative	WDT	wh-determiner
LS	List item marker	WP	wh-pronoun
MD	Modal	WP\$	Possessive wh-pronoun
NN	Noun, singular or mass	WRB	wh-adverb
NNS	Noun, plural	#	Pound sign
NNP	Proper noun, singular	\$	Dollar sign
NNPS	Proper noun, plural	.	Sentence-final punctuation
PDT	Predeterminer	,	Comma
POS	Possessive ending	:	Colon, semi-colon
PRP	Personal pronoun	(Left bracket character
PRP\$	Possessive pronoun)	Right bracket character
RB	Adverb	"	Straight double quote
RBR	Adverb, comparative	'	Left open single quote
RBS	Adverb, superlative	"	Left open double quote
RP	Particle	'	Right close single quote
SYM	Symbol	"	Right close double quote

Fishing for compliments

Precision and recall in corpus-linguistic compliment research

Andreas H. Jucker, Gerold Schneider, Irma Taavitsainen,
Barb Breustedt

1. Introduction

Speech acts are not readily amenable to corpus-linguistic investigations. They are defined through their illocutionary force or, more rarely, through their perlocutionary effect, and neither of these can be searched for directly. Therefore, speech acts can only be found in large corpora if they appear regularly with standard illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs) or in largely routinized forms. These IFIDs and routinized formulae can be used as search strings. In the case of questions, for instance, interrogative sentence constructions and, in writing, the presence of a question mark are typical IFIDs. In the case of apologies the presence of lexemes such as *sorry*, *excuse (me)* or *pardon* are typical features. But the presence of such features is never a guarantee for a particular speech act. The speech act may be carried out in other forms as well, and the forms may occur in other contexts.

Corpus-linguistic methods for speech act analysis are discussed in several recent studies. Deutschmann (2003) argues, on the basis of his investigation using the *British National Corpus*, that apologies tend to occur in well-defined patterns. In a similar vein, Kohnen (2000a, 2000b, 2002, 2004) argues that directives can be located in historical corpora on the basis of their form. Alternatively, the researcher can retrieve speech act verbs from corpora, as Taavitsainen and Jucker (2007) did when studying speech acts of verbal aggression, but speech act verbs are used performatively only occasionally. If somebody says: "I apologize!" he or she uses the verb performatively and by saying it actually apologizes. Such performatively used verbs are IFIDs in their own right. More often, however, speech act verbs are used descriptively, e.g. the occurrence of a verb like *scorn* or *insult* usually does not indicate the presence of the speech act in its original form, but more often such words are used as labels of speech acts. In most cases they give an account of how somebody on an occasion insulted somebody else or perhaps, more abstractly as a whole repertoire with several instances, they reveal an ethnographic view of what was considered insulting in a culture. Likewise, the presence

of the word *apology* may indicate on what occasions apologies were needed or how they should be used in general.

Compliments have received a fair amount of attention from various scholars (see Taavitsainen and Jucker on compliments this volume and references there). They have been investigated from a cross-cultural perspective, and, in particular, the responses that people give when they receive compliments have been analyzed extensively. But so far there have been no corpus-based investigations, even though there are claims in the relevant literature that compliments are highly routinized and formulaic. In their pioneering study, Manes and Wolfson (1981: 115) claim that “one of the most striking features of compliments in American English is their almost total lack of originality”, and Holmes (1988: 452) supports this view: “Compliments are remarkably formulaic speech acts in that a very small number of lexical items and syntactic patterns account for the great majority of them.” The formulaic nature of compliments is taken for granted, but a more precise description of the formulae and their historical development, based on modern computer-aided methods, remains to be done.¹

2. Methodological challenges

Empirical studies using authentic data have undergone a paradigm shift in English linguistics in recent decades. Corpus-linguistic methods rely on processing large quantities of authentic data using statistical methods. Technical developments in the field have been rapid, from the first pilot studies to present-day, data-driven accounts of language use. The *Longman Grammar* (1999), for example, is based on a 40-million-word corpus, and we also have dictionaries based on frequency counts from corpora of hundreds of millions of words (for a brief history, see McEnery and Wilson 1996: 1–27). Software to investigate linguistic patterns has also been developed and has become more readily available. In general, corpus linguistics has shifted the emphasis of linguistic analysis to frequently occurring linguistic features and made comparisons with earlier assumptions of frequently occurring patterns possible. The research for this paper is based on the *British National Corpus*, which contains 100 million words of written and spoken language from various sources in Present-day British English.

It is a well-known fact that the applied methods as well as the corpus design influence the results. It is only reasonable to expect that an assessment of large multimillion-word databases with naturally occurring spoken language yield somewhat different results from materials picked up by qualitative reading, collected by elicitation or

1. A preliminary study tracing the formulae was conducted by Magnus Levin a few years ago and presented in a paper read at the ICAME Conference in Verona, 2004. He discovered 544 formulaic compliments of American and British English in spoken corpora (*The Longman Spoken American Corpus* and *British National Corpus* respectively). To our knowledge, the paper has not been published.

recorded by the diary method. The data on which the early studies on compliments were based were collected by several researchers in various situations in everyday interactions which the researchers observed or in which they participated (Manes and Wolfson 1981: 116). Holmes used the same method and the help of students in collecting her corpus (1988: 446). Manes and Wolfson claim specific frequencies for each of the patterns that they found in their corpus. Of the 686 compliments collected by Manes and Wolfson and their co-researchers, one pattern accounts for more than half of all the compliments. Their database was comprehensive by field linguistic standards. Holmes used 484 compliment exchanges in her study, which is also a high sample size. Her observations were in accordance with the patterns established by Manes and Wolfson. She found that “three syntactic patterns accounted for 85 per cent of the 686 compliments in their American corpus. This finding is replicated in the New Zealand data” (Holmes 1988: 452–453). The challenge that we undertake in this chapter is to assess the statements made on the basis of this ethnographic, field-collected material with the help of modern corpus-linguistic tools and a large electronic database of naturally occurring Present-day English: the *British National Corpus*. We set out to explore what results the patterns established by Manes and Wolfson yield in corpus-based searches and to test the accuracy of their claims. Our aim is to find out whether the same patterns can be observed in our corpus data, and whether these patterns occur with frequencies that are similar to those in the earlier data. Another aim of our study is to learn more about the nature of compliments and speech acts in order to investigate speech acts more efficiently and improve our corpus-based methods. Thus the emphasis is on developing the methodology of corpus-based searches for pragmatic research tasks and applying the results to historical corpus studies. The test proved more difficult than expected, and two fundamental problems came to light. First, the search for the relevant patterns may retrieve a large number of extracts that have the appropriate structure but which are not compliments. This is the problem of precision. In addition, the searches may, for various reasons, fail to find all relevant compliments in the corpus. This is the problem of recall and it presents the second major flaw in corpus-based searches.

The paper is structured as follows. In section 3, we discuss our point of departure, the definitions and methods of research, combining automatic searches with manual assessment. Classification problems and inter-annotator agreement issues receive special attention. In section 4, we introduce the main patterns suggested by Manes and Wolfson (1981) and present our search strings approximating the patterns. We discuss them in detail, with special focus on pattern 1, which is their most frequent, and we provide illustrative examples from the *British National Corpus*. We discuss the limitations of our approximations, report the numbers of hits and percentages of examples, and illustrate our precision and recall optimization strategies for their pattern. In section 5, we compare our findings and relative frequencies to those of Manes and Wolfson (1981), discuss differences and raise relevant questions about possible explanations.

Finally, we conclude by bringing the discussion to a more general level and suggesting lines for future research.

3. Points of departure

3.1 Definitions of compliments

Manes and Wolfson (1981: 116) give a very general definition of compliments as “expressions of positive evaluation”. They note that there was no need for further elaboration as “the students, naïve native speakers, did not ask that compliments be described or defined for them and indicated no confusion concerning what was expected of them. The data which they collected, with almost no exceptions, were unambiguously identifiable as compliments” (1981: 127). Thus they take a strong “folklinguistic” view of compliments, relying on naïve native-speaker intuition. A more technical definition of compliments is given by Holmes and it is also taken as the point of departure in the historical study of modern compliments in this chapter:

A compliment is a speech act which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the person addressed, for some ‘good’ (possession, characteristic, skill etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer. (Holmes 1988: 446, 1995: 117)

Although this definition gives more accurate guidelines for the recognition of compliments, the issue proved more complicated and showed that the borderlines are fuzzy.

3.2 Method: Combining quantitative and qualitative assessment

Our method of study consisted of several stages. In preparation for the electronic searches, we translated the patterns given by Manes and Wolfson (1981) into query language. We chose to use the CQP query language (Hoffmann and Evert 2006) for formulating the patterns. The CQP query language has a simple but powerful syntax which allows sophisticated searches for individual words and for lexico-grammatical patterns and supports regular expressions.

Almost every query method fails to have complete precision and recall. Let us first consider recall. For example, a simple word query has incomplete recall since words containing typos remain unmatched. Queries relying on part-of-speech tags have incomplete recall as the BNC is not completely error-free. Syntactic query patterns based on part-of-speech tags have incomplete recall because it is virtually impossible to account for all possible sequences that can be generated from an inherently hierarchical system such as language.

The more abstract the linguistic level of the query, the more frequent such errors become. Yet at all levels of language, versions of Zipf’s law apply (see e.g. Baroni 2007

for an introduction to Zipf), that is, marked or rare phenomena are extremely infrequent and distributions tail off sharply. This means that as long as the distribution of the phenomenon under investigation can be assumed to be independent of the distribution of the cases unmatched by a pattern, we get reliable results. Let us consider a search for noun phrases: even very elaborate patterns will fail to find all arbitrarily long and nested noun phrases. If our investigation aimed at finding out the maximum length of a noun phrase, such an approach would be totally inappropriate, there would be a very strong dependence between the investigation and the unmatched patterns. If our investigation aimed at describing the use of the definite versus the indefinite article, however, it is reasonable to assume that the few very long unmatched noun phrases would not show behavior that is fundamentally different, and we could also expect that if we carefully wrote and tested increasingly sophisticated patterns, the loss in recall would be very small since the unmatched, very complex noun phrases would be extremely few.

As for precision, a simple word query leads to errors if a token has a rare part-of-speech tag (for example the word *can* as a noun in *can of beer*), or if it is an abbreviation (for example *can* as an abbreviation for *Canada*). Syntactic query patterns based on part-of-speech tags lead to many precision errors because of the lack of any parsing context and because of the possible tagging errors in the BNC mentioned above. In a query looking for verb-object relations, for example the sentence *Experts fear the virus will spread*, a pattern-based approach inevitably returns a verb-object relation between *fear* and *virus*. In typical corpus-linguistic methodology, results are filtered manually, so that precision errors are not a serious problem until the number of hits exceeds what is possible to scan manually, and until precision falls below a certain threshold: one tends to overlook positive examples if precision is much lower than 1 per cent.

The statistics derived from the counts reported in the BNC can thus be accepted as reliable if we assume that they can be extrapolated to the few unmatched cases. The individual limitations of each pattern will be described separately.

The results of pattern 1 were overwhelming, and for the second phase we had to revert to a random sample of utterances to make the qualitative analysis possible. A representative sample of 300 examples was studied independently in order to screen the relevant examples from the “noise”, i.e. the irrelevant examples.

3.3 Inter-annotator agreement

Classification problems are often faced in corpus-linguistic studies as there is always a subjective element in qualitative studies. The problems are often bypassed without recognition, but we wanted to refine the method by introducing to our linguistic study a well-established practice used in other disciplines (see, for instance, Altman 1999). Two annotators independently annotated the hits returned by our patterns, which allows us to measure inter-annotator agreement and to assess the epistemic status of compliments as a linguistic category. We proceeded as follows for the annotation. After

discussing the status of compliments in linguistics according to the definitions given above and considering some examples from the BNC corpus, two authors of this paper annotated the patterns individually, i.e. classified the material into “compliments” and “other”. Annotator 1 found 237 compliments in pattern [1b], annotator 2 found 290 compliments. Annotator 1 found 26 compliments in pattern [1ab], annotator 2 established 28 compliments. Differing opinions on classification may lead to low inter-annotator agreement. Inter-annotator agreement was measured as the sum of the cases where both annotators regarded the match as a compliment divided by the sum of the cases where at least one annotator annotated the match as a compliment. For the fully manually-annotated subpatterns of pattern [1], i.e. patterns [1b] and [1ab] together, this came to $249/339 = 73.5$ per cent. For all the fully manually-annotated patterns (not only pattern 1) inter-annotator agreement was 76.6 per cent. For our compliment count we use the conservative approach of only counting matching cases where both annotators classified the utterance as a compliment.

4. Assessment of the patterns

We now take up the formulae discussed in Manes and Wolfson (1981: 120–121), examples 29 to 37 in their text, and give illustrative examples.

The patterns as described in the following are all approximations, as we have mentioned in section 3.2. They share the general limitation that they fail to cover some embedded forms (Manes and Wolfson 1981: 121). Manes and Wolfson give three examples of embedded forms. Their examples (38) and (40) (1981: 120–121) match a simple, intuitive pattern: a simple noun phrase followed by a verb (often a copula) and a positive evaluation centered on an adjective. (38) is repeated here as (1), (40) as (2), italics added.

- (1) I think *your hair looks good* this way.
- (2) Why don't you just accept the fact that *you did a good job*

But (39), repeated here as (3), involves a surface word order alteration which means that the corresponding pattern fails to match.

- (3) By the way, I have to tell you how *professional* I thought *your magazine looked*.

If we are ready to assume that examples such as (3) are not fundamentally different with respect to the phenomenon of compliments from (1) and (2), then we can obtain reliable descriptions using these patterns. We will now discuss the individual patterns.

4.1 Pattern 1

The first pattern is represented as follows in Manes and Wolfson (1981). The number in brackets represents the percentage of compliments in their corpus of elicited examples which match the pattern given in [1].

$$[1] \text{ NP } \left\{ \begin{array}{c} \textit{is} \\ \textit{looks} \end{array} \right\} (\textit{really}) \text{ ADJ (53.6 per cent)}$$

In this and all the other patterns, NP stands for a noun phrase, which typically includes a second-person possessive determiner or a demonstrative determiner. It may also stand for a personal or demonstrative pronoun. The curly brackets signify an option, and the round brackets an optional element. Verbs are cited in the present tense, but may occur in other forms. *Look* stands for any linking verb other than *be* (*look, seem, smell, feel, ...*). *Really* stands for any intensifier (*really, very, so, such, ...*). And ADJ stands for any semantically positive adjective. Examples reported by Manes and Wolfson (1981: 121) include *Your hair looks nice* or *This is really good*.

In CQP pattern [1] can be approximated as

$$[1a] \text{ _NN* (is|re|are|were|look*|seem*) (really|very|such|so) _AJ0}$$

It returns 7690 matches from the BNC. Pattern [1a] is an approximation. It both over-generates and under-generates with respect to pattern [1] of Manes and Wolfson. Over-generation leads to precision errors, under-generation to recall errors. As mentioned above, moderate over-generation is no problem because manual filtering is used. Over or under-generation of pattern [1] can be attributable to the following:

- i. It over-generates because the final adjective is unrestricted. The list of 72 adjectives collected by Manes and Wolfson is too long to expect that it could be complete. In order to keep recall levels acceptable, we have thus decided not to restrict the adjective.
- ii. It under-generates because the list of linking verbs is open in Manes and Wolfson (1981: footnote 5). They do not supply information on other linking verbs. They implicitly suggest that they can be assumed to be very rare. It is generally known that the set of copular verbs is closed and dominated by *be*, and that frequencies sharply tail off.
- iii. It under-generates because the list of intensifiers is also open in Manes and Wolfson (1981: footnote 5). Again, we can assume that the list of intensifiers is closed and tails off.
- iv. It seriously under-generates because it only reports cases that include an intensifier. Manes and Wolfson (1981: 118–119) point out that intensifiers occur in over a third of the data. A modification of pattern [1a] with an optional intensifier reports 114252 matches, a number that is too big to allow manual filtering, and that will have extremely low recall (see the precision of pattern [1a] below). We suggest the working assumption that the distribution of compliments with and without intensifiers is similar.

- v. It undergenerates because the search is restricted to NPs that end with a noun. This point is problematic. The discrepancy is greater here than in ii and iii, especially as Manes and Wolfson (1981: 119) observe that 75 per cent of all compliments in their data include second-person pronouns or demonstratives.

While it can be expected that the undergeneration mentioned in points ii and iii (closed list of linking verbs and intensifiers) is minimal, this cannot be expected for point v. Manes and Wolfson (1981: 119) observe that 75 per cent of all compliments in their data include second-person pronouns or demonstratives, which remain unmatched with pattern [1a]. As a remedy, we have thus formulated patterns for second-person pronouns and demonstratives, namely patterns [1b], [1c], [1aa] and [1ab]. In pattern [1b], the initial NP is the second-person pronoun *you*.

[1b] you (re|are|were|look*|smell*|seem*) (really|very|such|so) _AJ0

It returns 1226 matches. A compliment example is given in extract (4).

- (4) Mrs Browning was hardly less excited than Ferdinando. Paying her first visit to the Casa Guidi Wilson was moved to exclaim, “Why, ma’am, **you look so well!**” Mrs Browning laughed and made a gesture of dismissal. “Oh, I am tired of being told so, Wilson.”

(BNC ADS 763–765)

In pattern [1c] the initial NP is a demonstrative pronoun. We have observed that [1c] overlaps with pattern [3] given in section 4.3. In order to exclude this overlap, an extended pattern was actually employed, given as [1cX], which excludes cases where the final adjective is followed by a noun. This extended pattern could only be formulated in extended CQP syntax. The queries and the number of returned matches are listed in the following.

[1c] _DT0 (is|re|are|were|look*|smell*|seem*) (really|very|such|so) _AJ0
 [1cX] [pos = “DT0” %c] ([word = “is” %c] | [word = “re” %c] | [word = “are” %c] | [word = “were” %c] | [word = “look.*” %c] | [word = “smell.*” %c] | [word = “seem.*” %c]) ([word = “really” %c] | [word = “very” %c] | [word = “so” %c] | [word = “such” %c]) [pos = “AJ0” %c] [pos != “NN.*”]

Pattern [1c] returns 820 matches, pattern [1cX] reduced this to 721 matches. A compliment example is given in extract (5). It is noteworthy that this compliment is immediately followed by a second one. The second compliment corresponds to pattern 7 discussed below.

- (5) “Let’s have a look at your book then.” Quickly she would flick through his exercise books, glancing from page to page as they flew by. “Oh, **this is very good**, Alan. What a brainbox you are!”

(BNC HJH 546–549)

A version of pattern [1a], where the noun head of the initial NP is preceded by the second-person pronoun *your*, is [1aa].

[1aa] your _NN* (is|re|are|were|look*| smell*|seem*) (really|very|such|so) _AJ0

It returns 716 matches. A compliment example is given in extract (6).

- (6) “What about you, Megan. You’re lookin’ grand. **Your hair is so long!**” “Aye, I’m a real woman now.”
(BNC HGL 1326–29)

Without context, the sentence *Your hair is so long* cannot be identified as a compliment but, with the preceding compliment, *You’re lookin’ grand* (pattern [1a]) and, in particular, with the following compliment response, it is clear that the two speakers involved in the example treat *Your hair is so long* as a compliment.

A version of [1a] where the noun head of the initial NP is preceded by a demonstrative pronoun is [1ab].

[1ab] _DT _NN* (is|re|are|were|look*| smell*|seem*) (really|very|such|so) _AJ0

It returns 94 matches. Extract (7) contains two relevant examples.

- (7) Tracy: **Those curtains look really nice.**
Annette: Do they look nice? <pause> Yeah that’s nice.
Teresa: It’s got a huge bobble on it.
Annette: Yeah, Tracy said **your curtains look really nice.**
(BNC KB9 111–115)

The 7690 matches of pattern [1a] are too numerous for complete manual inspection. We have selected a random subset of 300 matches for manual inspection. This revealed that, out of the 300 examples, only one was a compliment, defined by the criteria of the definition. This finding corresponds to a precision of 0.33 per cent. This indicates that precision for this subset is generally very low, most likely below 1 per cent. If we extrapolate to the entire BNC we can expect only about 25 compliments to correspond to pattern [1a].

We have mentioned that Manes and Wolfson (1981: 119) observe that 75 per cent of all compliments in their data include second-person pronouns or demonstratives, cases which pattern [1a] largely fails to include. The patterns that we have formulated for these cases, [1b], [1cX], [1aa] and [1ab] can thus be expected to deliver the bulk of compliments following pattern 1. Since the matches returned by these patterns are considerably fewer, we have manually inspected most of them, and we can expect precision to be considerably higher. The qualitative assessment is necessary as it is the context of utterance and the response to it that defines whether the phrase can be classified as a compliment.

Precision of pattern [1b] indeed turned out to be much higher, about 20 per cent. It would be higher still if only a closed list of positive adjectives were used, but since

the list of adjectives compiled by Manes and Wolfson (1981) seems to be too large to be closed we left the adjective unrestricted. In addition to the “expected” adjectives that Manes and Wolfson list, such as *good* and *nice*, we also found many adjectives that they do not list, for example *talented*, *sexy*, *friendly*, *wise*, *kind*, *lovely*, *fit*, *sensible*, etc. Two examples of these include the following.

- (8) He poured the wine and lit a cigarette for himself. “I won’t offer you one. I’m sure you don’t smoke. **You look so fit.**” – “I am fit. I swim thirty lengths twice a week. I work out with weights for two hours on Saturdays.”
(BNC A0R 1231–1237)
- (9) “I do not see that anything else will do, not for the moment. The situation is too far gone. This is what she wants and so perhaps it is what she needs. We can only carry out her wishes, we can only try.” – “**You are so sensible**, you have always seen things in a clearer light.” Florence Ames shook her head. “It does not make me happy. I have seen too much of this.”
(BNC AD1 2842–2849)

We will now discuss some of the compliments that we have found using pattern [1b] and classification. We shall pay special attention to problem cases of classification. The comments we make also apply to all other patterns. It is always very important to look at the context carefully. Even seemingly very positive evaluations can be far removed from compliments. In the following example, a typical compliment phrase occurs as a response to an intimidating gesture; obviously the utterance is not a compliment at all but a collaborative second part to the posed question, playing along with the “game”.

- (10) As Estella was leading me along the dark passages, she stopped suddenly and put her face close to mine. “Look at me, boy! Am I pretty?” – “Yes, I think **you’re very pretty.**” – “Am I rude to you?” – “Not as much as last time.” – She hit my face as hard as she could. – “Now, you coarse little boy, what do you think of me?” – “I won’t tell you.”
(BNC FPU 542–550)

An example that we have judged to be a compliment, although in very grave circumstances, is the following.

- (11) “You see” -- his voice trembled slightly, his blue eyes became haunted, his bloom of good looks seemed to collapse inwards -- “I have cancer. I’m told I have six months to live. If you could write something -- anything -- I’d appreciate it so much.” -- “My God, that’s terrible!” I said. “**And you look so well.**”
(BNC AE0 1951–1956)

Some compliments are forced, the receiver of the compliment clearly expects to be complimented. We have decided to classify them as compliments, even if they are not deliberate compliments, but concrete examples of “fishing for compliments”.

- (12) “Still, the blouse and skirt don’t look too bad, d’you think?” – “**You look very nice, Dolly.**” – “Like to take me out, would you?”
(BNC CKE 2304–2306)

An especially problematic set of examples is provided by ironical or playful compliments. They are particularly frequent in fiction (see Taavitsainen and Jucker on compliments this volume). The following example represents ironical compliments. The negative evaluations and more subtle meanings have to be assessed in the context of the unfolding discourse. We do not count them as compliments if the meanings are clearly ironical, turning the positive surface utterance into negative evaluation (cf. the definition above).

- (13) “Oh, Squadron Leader Latimer, **you’re so brave.** Marry me, and make me happy ever after.” She poured out her scorn, and with it her jealousy and frustrated rage. Johnny remained silent for a time, and then said: “Shut up Bella. Hold your tongue.”
(BNC G1S 2961–2966)

Playful compliments presented problems, and examples with playful meanings provide many of the cases in which the two annotators had differing opinions (for inter-annotator agreement, see above). The spoken part of the BNC, especially, contains many such playful compliments. Problems were presented by cases where a positive evaluation is potentially outweighed by a negative connotation, as in the following example, which was annotated as a compliment by one annotator, but not as a compliment by the second annotator.

- (14) “My precious White Rose!” murmured the queen-dowager. “**You are so young, so tender** -- you know not the wickedness of the world, of devious and ambitious rascals. How could you know! ...”
(BNC CCD 1401)

Many examples may have a compliment component but it is unclear, or they only have very little compliment force, often using conventionalized phrases. While we, in principle, agreed not to count them as compliments inter-annotator agreement was also relatively low on these examples.

- (15) I know immediately that I wouldn’t like to go; I would hate to be a servant in a posh house, but I find it difficult to say this. Eventually, at tea time, I tell Nicola’s mother that I can’t go to India because I’m starting a course at university. She says in her calm, posh voice that this is fine, and continues to stir the curry she is making for their evening meal. Do I like curry? she wants to know. Feeling guilty again, for not liking curry and for not wanting to go to India and letting her down, I say no, I will just have a boiled egg and toast, I’m not very hungry, that will be fine. “**Your needs are very small,**” she remarks. I think it is an odd comment. What does she mean? Obviously, she is talking

about the boiled egg and toast, but it is a funny way of putting things, talking about “needs” and not appetite or eating habits. It sticks in my mind. For some reason, it disturbs me.
(BNC ADG 178–188)

Expressions that look like compliments are often used as a conventionalized phrase to introduce a request or kindly reject an offer or indeed a compliment. We have excluded obvious cases from the compliment class, but again inter-annotator agreement is relatively low.

- (16) Kee looked at Conway. He said, “I am a houngan, and I understand voodoo. I know you come from America, and you Americans do not believe in things like that. But I can do many things that you do not understand. I will help you if you are good to me.” – “**You’re very kind,**” said Conway, laughing at the old man. “But I really don’t think your voodoo can give me all the things I want in life.”
(BNC GWA 406–412)
- (17) After the meal, Dolores had cut up a huge melon, and dished out chunks on their plates. Then she brought them all strong black coffee. “It is an honour to have you here,” she told Shelley. – “**You’re very kind to me.**”
(BNC JYA 3223–3226)

Some compliments appear as a part of a prayer or a ritual ceremony. We have decided to view them as conventionalized or ritual phrases outside the scope of normal interaction of speakers and hearers in the everyday world, and therefore we do not annotate them as compliments. In the examples below, the use of the second person is more generic and ritualistic (example 18). An address to God (example 19) does not count as a compliment either.

- (18) Meanwhile Panna, despite her bulk, was putting on a fine display. She wobbled her head one way, wobbled her bottom the other, all the while singing an Urdu verse which Zakir translated as follows: God bless you, **You are very sweet, You are very lovely**, God will give you long life.
(BNC H89 652–657)
- (19) Songs such as “Father God I wonder...”, “You are here...”, “Lord **you are so precious to me...**” are appropriate here, with lines that express this intimacy.
(BNC C8L 1451–1453)

There are a number of meta-compliments in the BNC, comments about compliments. One of the annotators excluded obvious cases, such as the following.

- (20) Once upon a time (I said, and he stared bitterly bitterly at the floor) there was a very ugly monster who captured a princess and put her in a dungeon in his castle. Every evening he made her sit with him and ordered her to say to him, “**You are very handsome, my lord.**” And every evening she said, “You are very

ugly, you monster.” And then the monster looked very hurt and sad and stared at the floor.

(BNC G07 2338–2341)

In short, pattern [1b] delivers 226 cases which both annotators have marked as compliment, pattern [1ab] 23 cases. Pattern [1cX] returns 721 matches, of which manual inspection of a 100 random sample showed that precision is very low (about 1 per cent). Pattern [1aa] returns 716 matches, of which manual inspection of a 100 random sample showed that precision is also very low (also about 1 per cent).

4.2 Pattern 2

Manes and Wolfson’s (1981) second pattern is represented as follows.

$$[2] \text{ I (really) } \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \textit{like} \\ \textit{love} \end{array} \right\} \text{ NP (16.1 per cent)}$$

In this pattern, *like* and *love* stand for any verb of liking (*like, love, admire, enjoy, ...*). Examples reported by Manes and Wolfson (1981) are *I love your hair* and *I really like those shoes*. Examples that we found in the BNC include the following.

- (21) “**I really admire you**, bringing up four from the time the youngest was only five *and* working full time.” “No bravery. Circumstances dictated it.”
(BNC ABW 2307–2309)
- (22) As a newcomer to the sport, **I really enjoy your Saturday golf pages**.
(BNC CEK 1877)

Pattern 2 was approximated as follows.

$$\text{I (really|very|so|such) (like|love|admire|enjoy) (_AT0|_DT0|_NN*|_DPS|_PNP)}$$

It delivered 94 matches. This approximation over- and undergenerates with respect to pattern 2, for similar reasons as in pattern 1.

Eleven of the 94 matches were classified as compliments by both annotators; precision is thus about 12 per cent. The distribution is very irregular. In six of the cases which were not classified as a compliment, the final NP is the second-person pronoun *you*; ten cases are direct speech or from spoken parts of the BNC. There are three cases where the final NP starts with the pronoun *your*. Compared to pattern 1, which delivered far more than a hundred compliments, pattern 2 delivers very few.

4.3 Pattern 3

The third pattern is represented as follows.

$$[3] \text{ PRO is (really) (a) ADJ NP (14.9 per cent)}$$

As above, ADJ stands for any semantically positive adverb. PRO stands for a personal or demonstrative pronoun, *you, this, that, these* or *those*. Examples reported by Manes and Wolfson (1981) are *That is a nice piece of work* and *This was really a great meal*. An example that we found in the BNC is the following.

- (23) On Wednesday the tea party started very well. “**These are very good cakes, Miss Cuthbert,**” Mrs Allan said to Marilla.
(BNC FPT 309–310)

Pattern 3 was approximated as follows.

[3a](_DT0|you) (is|are|’re|were) (really|very|such|so) _AJ0 _NN*

[3b](_DT0|you) (is|are|’re|were) (really|very|such|so) a _AJ0 _NN*

Pattern [3a] has 115 matches, [3b] has 46 matches. [3a] contains three compliments, [3b] contains five compliments. Contrary to the results in Manes and Wolfson (1981), pattern 3 delivers very few compliments. Most of the matches for [3b] are clearly negative assessments and therefore not compliments. Again, there is a marked difference to the results of Manes and Wolfson (1981).

4.4 Pattern 4

The first three patterns account for 85 per cent of all compliments in Manes and Wolfson’s (1981) corpus. In addition, six other patterns, patterns 4 to 9, emerged (Manes and Wolfson 1981: 120–121 and footnote 5, p.132). These nine patterns together cover 97.2 per cent of the data.

The fourth pattern is represented as follows.

[4] You V (a) (really) ADJ NP (3.3 per cent)

An example from Manes and Wolfson is *You did a good job*. An example that we found in the BNC is given in extract (24).

- (24) “I’m here on a two-year contract. **You speak very good English.**” A chink is temporarily exposed. He smiles to himself in the mirror. “It’s for the job,” he says proudly, “I get promotion if I speak good English.”
(BP8 394–398)

Pattern 4 was approximated as follows.

[4a] you _V* (really|very|so|such) _AJ0 _NN*

[4b] you _V* (really|very|so|such) a _AJ0 _NN*

Pattern [4a] has 75 matches, [4b] has 46 matches. [4a] contains ten compliments, precision is thus quite high, about 13 per cent. [4b] contains seven compliments, precision is high, about 15 per cent.

4.5 Pattern 5

The fifth pattern is represented as follows.

[5] You V (NP) (really) ADV (2.7 per cent)

An example from Manes and Wolfson is *You really handled that situation well*. An example that we found in the BNC is given in extract (25).

- (25) “It was Bach?” “Telemann.” “**You play very well.**” “Once, I *could* play. Never mind.”
(BNC G13 357–361)

Pattern 5 was approximated as follows.

[5a] you _V* (really|very|so|such) _AV0

[5b] you _V* _NN* (really|very|so|such) _AV0

[5c] you _V* _AT0 _NN* (really|very|so|such) _AV0

Pattern [5a] has 409 matches. A random 100 sample of [5a] contained five compliments. By linear extrapolation we can expect about 20 compliments from [5a] in the BNC. Pattern [5b] has twelve matches, and [5c] has ten matches. The approximation of the optional NP to a noun or a determiner and noun is very crude, but the very low numbers suggest that these two patterns deliver only few compliments. [5b] contains two compliments, [5c] none.

4.6 Pattern 6

The sixth pattern is represented as follows.

[6] You have (a) (really) ADJ NP (2.4 per cent)

An example from Manes and Wolfson is *You have such beautiful hair*. An example that we found in the BNC is given in extract (26).

- (26) He raised her hand to his lips and kissed it, then continued to hold it against his lips. “Why didn’t you tell me **you had such a beautiful name?**”
(BNC JXT 3146–3147)

Pattern 6 is a subset of pattern 4 in our approximation. Manes and Wolfson (1981) explicitly mention that they treat *have* separately. We will thus report joint results for pattern 4 and 6 when we compare our findings to Manes and Wolfson in section 5.

4.7 Pattern 7

The seventh pattern is represented as follows.

[7] What (a) ADJ NP! (1.6 per cent)

An example from Manes and Wolfson is *What a lovely baby you have!* An example that we found in the BNC is the following.

- (27) “Hot soup is so restoring,” she said. “*So restoring!*” cried Madame Maillot, or whatever her name is. “**What a perfect expression!** Who but you could think of it?”
(CA6 1401–1404)

Pattern 7 was approximated as follows.

[7a] what _AJ0 _NN*!

[7b] what _AJ0 _NN*!

Pattern [7a] has 134 matches, [7b] has 13 matches. Pattern [7a] contains ten compliments. Pattern [7b] contains no compliments.

4.8 Pattern 8

The eighth pattern is represented as follows.

[8] ADJ NP! (1.6 per cent)

An example from Manes and Wolfson is *Nice game!*. Two examples that we found in the BNC are the following.

- (28) There was very little inconvenience in leaving out the butter and salad cream, and I have enjoyed the diet even more whilst watching the inches disappear, and enjoying being complimented on how much slimmer I look. Oh, and how lovely to be able to open the wardrobe doors and say “I haven’t got anything to wear -- they are all *too big*.” **Absolute Heaven!** Very many thanks.
(BNC BNS 173–176)
- (29) “... little support <pause> are most affected <pause> and we need to er, go back to what Kathleen was saying about education, we need to <pause> help young girls get self-confidence, more se--, coping skills to deal with these pressures, but also, as other people have said, we need to get the government to look at the fact as, that <pause> encourage women to keep smoking <pause> and address those issues as well.” -- “**Good discussion!** Thank you all very much indeed!”
(BNC FLM 423–425)

Pattern 8 was approximated as follows.

[8]. _AJ0 _NN*!

It has 388 matches in the BNC. We found three compliments in a random 100 match subset, which extrapolates to about eleven compliments in all the matches.

4.9 Pattern 9

The ninth pattern is represented as follows.

[9] Isn't NP ADJ! (1.0 per cent)

We have approximated pattern 9 as follows.

[9] is {not} _NN* _AJ0!

An example from Manes and Wolfson is *Isn't your ring beautiful!*. The pattern does not return any matches from the BNC. Modified versions of the pattern, for example,

[9a] is {not} _NN* _AJ0?

return few matches (63 in the case of [9a]) but none of them is a compliment. We have therefore not found any compliment of this type in the BNC.

5. Discussion

5.1 Query problems

As shown above, it is possible to search modern tagged corpora with compliment formulae like “NP is/looks [intensifier] ADJ”; “I [intensifier] like/love NP”; “PRO is [intensifier] ADJ NP”. Preliminary tests on the tagged version of BNC showed that the patterns are approximations that either over- or undergenerate for various reasons as the patterns that we have used are approximations. The main shortcoming is that they require an intensifier in order to alleviate the filtering task. Either intensifiers are distributed extremely unhomogenously across the patterns, or else explanations need to be found for the striking fact that pattern 1 occurs far more frequently, and patterns 2 and 3 occur far less frequently than expected. The comparison between expected contributions from Manes and Wolfson versus our BNC data is shown textually in table 1, and graphically in figure 1. The BNC counts and percentages reported are based on complete manual rating for patterns 2, 3, 4 and 6, 7, and 9, and on linear extrapolation from random subsets for parts of pattern 1 – as explained in detail in section 5.2 – and for patterns 5 and 8.

Table 1. Compliment pattern frequencies in Manes and Wolfson’s data and in the BNC

Approximation to pattern	BNC compliment counts	BNC compliment (per cent)	Manes and Wolfson compliment (per cent)
1	262	76.4%	53.6%
2	11	3.2%	16.1%
3	8	2.3%	14.9%
4 and 6	17	5.0%	5.7%
5	22	6.4%	2.7%
7	12	3.5%	1.6%
8	11	3.2%	1.6%
9	0		1.0%
TOTAL	343	100%	97.2%

There are a number of reasons why the surface patterns used are crude. For example, they cannot catch repairs, hesitations, marked constituent order etc.; approximations to higher level constituents such as NPs are often crude, and they depend on intensifiers. The differences are big enough to warrant closer investigation, however.

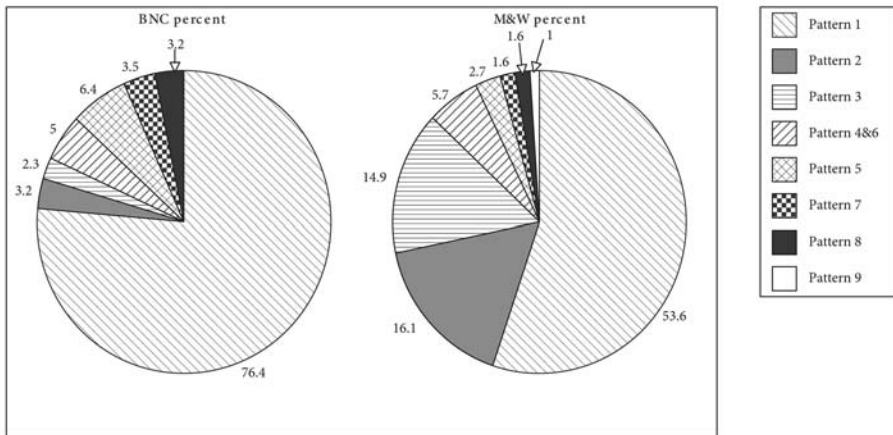


Figure 1. Compliment pattern frequencies in the BNC graphically compared to Manes and Wolfson’s (M&W) data

5.2 Precision and recall revisited

As mentioned in the introduction, the two major problems revealed by our study were those of precision and recall. We have described in section 4.1 how we approximated Manes and Wolfson’s pattern 1 by means of several subpatterns. Both precision and

recall of pattern [1b] are much higher than precision and recall of pattern [1a]. Recall of [1a] was 0.33 per cent in a random subset of 300 matches, recall of [1b] on the whole BNC is about 20 per cent. Since the total number of compliments expected to be found by pattern [1a] is quite small, and since a manual inspection of all the matches is prohibitive, we have allowed ourselves to assume that the random sample is representative of all the matches of pattern [1a]. We now address the question of precision and recall of our other patterns corresponding to Manes and Wolfson's pattern 1.

Precision of pattern [1cX] turns out to be low, only about 1 per cent. A random 100 sample contained one example. By linear extrapolation we can expect about seven compliments coming from this pattern in the entire BNC. Precision of pattern [1aa] is also only about 1 per cent. A random 100 sample contained one example. By linear extrapolation we can expect about six examples in the BNC. Precision of pattern [1ab] is higher, about 25 per cent, the matches contained 24 compliments.

Patterns [1cX] and [1b] correct a recall error of [1a] (they are extensions of [1a]), patterns [1aa] and [1ab] are versions of [1a] with higher precision, they are in fact specific sub-patterns of [1a], which entails that they must have lower recall than [1a]. It is difficult to assess the amount of loss of recall precisely, but as a rough indication we can compare the linear extrapolation of [1aa] plus the manual count of [1ab] (29 cases) to the linear extrapolation of [1a] (25 cases). If the linear extrapolation of [1a] was considerably higher than the linear extrapolation of [1aa] plus the manual count of [1ab] this would indicate poor recall.

If we add the complete results of the manual annotation of patterns [1b] and [1ab] to the linear extrapolation counts for patterns [1cX] and [1aa], we can assess the number of compliments following pattern 1 in the BNC. We can expect slightly more than 250 compliments from pattern 1, as summarized in table 2.

Table 2. Frequencies of compliment patterns in BNC, manual assessment

Pattern	Count	Method
[1b]	226	Complete manual annotation, annotators agree
[1ab]	23	Complete manual annotation, annotators agree
[1cX]	7	Extrapolation from random sample
[1aa]	6	Extrapolation from random sample
Total	262	

If the observation in Manes and Wolfson (1981: 120) that pattern 1 delivers slightly more than half of all cases carries over from their diary collection method to our corpus search, then we can only expect about 500 compliments with intensifiers in the entire BNC, fewer even if we consider that our data seems to be more dominated by pattern 1 (see table 1). In Manes and Wolfson's data, over a third of the compliments

contain an intensifier (1981: 118–119). The total number of compliments would then not even reach 2000 cases.

6. Conclusions

The qualitative assessment with two independent annotators reinforced our previous view of speech acts as fuzzy notions (Jucker and Taavitsainen 2000). There is always a subjective element in interpretation, and it is the context that is the deciding factor. Context provides the clues for interpretation as meanings are negotiated. Both illocutions and perlocutions are important. Computerized searches are capable of locating locutions but qualitative assessments are needed in pragmatic research to reveal local meanings of the utterances.

Manes and Wolfson argue that only the ethnographic method is a reliable method for studying compliments. By ethnographic method they understand what might be called the diary method or the participant observation method. They argue that other types of data, such as novels or plays, are unsuitable because they conform to artistic requirements and they do not “reflect exactly the complexity of actual speech use” (1981: 115). The complexities and difficulties of interpretation came out clearly in our corpus study. Ironic utterances, even with opposite pejorative meanings, may have the same surface structure as compliments proper. Ritual and religious uses provide further cases in point in which the utterances cannot be taken at face value. Genre restrictions have to be taken into account, but once they are recognized and qualitative assessments of utterance meaning carried out, a wider range of material is perfectly acceptable for speech act studies and pragmatic research in general.

The frequencies of individual patterns that we found in our data differ considerably from those reported by Manes and Wolfson (1981). But it must be remembered that they collected their examples through the diary method. It is possible that some patterns were more salient to the collectors and therefore were more likely to be picked up and to be included in their collections. Our own investigation is heavily indebted to Manes and Wolfson because we rely on the patterns that they established on the basis of their data. It is very likely that there are other compliments hidden in the BNC that do not conform to any of the patterns established by Manes and Wolfson. However, in order to find out how many compliments we missed, a manual search of a substantial corpus would be needed, i.e. a bottom up approach in the sense of Kohonen (“Tracing directives through text and time”, this volume). Ultimately we would need large pragmatically tagged corpora. Such corpora are not yet available although some steps have been taken in that direction (Culpeper and Archer, this volume). On a large scale, pragmatic tagging cannot be carried out manually. If it is to be carried out automatically, we will presumably have to rely on (improved versions of) search algorithms like the ones that we developed for this paper.

No big corpora with sufficient material for a study like the present one were available at the time Manes and Wolfson (1981) or Holmes (1988) conducted their studies. The option of using corpora, or of arguing for or against their use did not present itself then, but the time has come to consider new options for retrieving material for pragmatic research tasks. For example, it is perhaps possible to develop the patterns for lexical searches and thus improve the precision and recall of computerized searches.

Several new lines of study emerge from the present one. Since the BNC contains varied genres, including fiction, a closer investigation of the dispersion across genres, as far as the low counts of the relatively rare phenomenon of compliments allows, would merit further consideration. Another major research line opens up with tagged historical corpora, but steps in that direction remain to be taken in a later study.

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Tracing directives through text and time

Towards a methodology of a corpus-based diachronic speech-act analysis

Thomas Kohnen

1. Introduction

Among the well-known major problems of a corpus-based diachronic speech-act analysis are the retrievability of speech acts and the assessment of their development in time (see Taavitsainen and Jucker 2007; Kohnen 2004, 2007). We do not know (and thus cannot access in a corpus) all the manifestations of a particular speech act in a past period (for example, the different ways of making a request in Old English). If we trace the development of one particular manifestation (for example, imperatives or constructions with *let's*), we cannot tell whether a decrease or increase in that manifestation applies to all the other manifestations as well. Thus a comprehensive quantitative and qualitative diachronic analysis of speech acts seems extremely difficult.

There are several ways in which researchers can approach and tackle this problem. In their study of verbal aggression, Taavitsainen and Jucker (2007) looked at the relevant speech-act verbs in a large mixed corpus, tracing the changing perceptions and functions of the speech acts of verbal aggression in the history of English. Since all the relevant speech-act verbs can be determined, the respective manifestations, that is, those making use of the speech-act verbs, can be retrieved systematically. Jucker, Schneider, Taavitsainen and Breustedt (this volume) and Valkonen (this volume) also choose the perspective of linguistic form. They start with specific patterns of linguistic expressions and test their precision and recall in large corpora (e.g. patterns often used as compliments or explicit performatives containing speech-act verbs of promising). These, and similar studies, produce instructive and remarkable results, given the complexity of the speech acts involved (e.g. compliments), the size of the corpora tested (e.g. the BNC) and the standards of qualitative assessment (inter-annotator agreement). Nevertheless, they always have to rely on an initial assumption about the formal specification of the speech act under investigation, and, however large the corpora tested, they cannot exclude the possibility that some other manifestations of the speech act are hidden somewhere in the corpus. Neither can they specify the frequency of these “unknown” manifestations.

In this chapter, I suggest a different approach to the problem, which employs more traditional, philological methods. This approach does not start with a specific linguistic form or patterns of linguistic form but attempts to determine all the relevant forms of a speech act in the history of English by means of a genre-based micro-analytic bottom-up methodology. It also attempts to determine the extent to which these forms are used in specific genres, thus revealing not only the variability of the manifestations but also genre-specific patterns and forms.

This paper gives an initial outline of this methodology. It is structured as follows. I will begin with a short overview of the basic steps of the procedure (section 2) and then present an application in terms of a study of directives (section 3). After discussing the data used (3.1) and the different manifestations of directives found (3.2), I will present the results relating to the variability and retrievability of the manifestations (3.3) and their distribution across genres (3.4). In a final step, I will report on some further studies which were conducted in order to extend the analysis (3.5). In the concluding section, I will comment on the problems which may be solved with the proposed method and on the seriousness of the problems which seem to remain.

2. A genre-based bottom-up methodology: The basic steps

The methodology I propose starts with a particular genre, its functional profile and a particular class of speech acts. Sermons and directive speech acts provide an instructive example. The primary function of sermons is religious instruction and this aim seems to have prevailed more or less throughout the history of English. One central element of religious instruction is telling people what they should or should not do. We can assume that it is natural for directive speech acts to occur in sermons. Thus a reasonable number of directives can be expected to be found in the data. In addition, diachronic changes in the manifestations can be seen against the background of a relatively stable functional profile.

When the genre and the class of speech acts are selected, a limited diachronic corpus of the genre is compiled (or chosen) which serves to retrieve the manifestations of the speech act. Since the aim of the proposed methodology is to find all the manifestations of the speech act under investigation, the analysis has to proceed “by hand”, that is, all the text excerpts have to be read, considering carefully which sections of text might serve the function of the relevant speech act. This task is extremely labour-intensive and the initial diachronic genre-based corpus must necessarily be rather limited. The microanalysis will produce a list of all the manifestations of the speech act under investigation in the data and thus a preliminary inventory of the manifestations. It will also give an initial account of their frequencies and proportions across time.

As a second step, this procedure will be repeated in other genres (for example, private letters and prayers). This microanalysis will probably reveal similar as well as different manifestations of the speech act, enriching the initial list of manifestations. It

will also give an account of their frequencies and distribution across time. It seems reasonable to assume that the more genres that are included, the less “new” manifestations will be found.

As a third step, select manifestations and their distribution are tested in larger multi-genre corpora in order to further refine the list of manifestations and to test their frequency and distribution against the background of a more comprehensive, possibly more representative, inventory of language use. The outcome will comprise a fairly detailed inventory of different manifestations, their distribution across text types and their diachronic developments.

It is hoped that the final list of manifestations, which may always be “updated”, will enable an analysis approaching a reasonable level of completeness and representativeness, which should significantly increase the retrievability of speech acts in diachronic corpus-based studies.

In addition, this method should also enhance our knowledge about the distribution of speech acts and their different manifestations across genres. In particular, we could find out about genre-specific profiles and about speech-act conventions which may or may not apply in certain genres, and we could trace the development of these phenomena in the history of English.

3. A study of directives

In the following, I will report on several studies which test the suggested method and which match the steps mentioned in the previous section. These studies also include a few previous investigations on the manifestations and distribution of directives (Kohnen 2006a, 2007 and the chapter on directives in Old English in this volume), but it is only here that these investigations are combined, supplemented with new studies involving other corpora and located within a framework of a systematic methodology of corpus-based diachronic speech-act analysis.

3.1 The data

The data comprise limited diachronic corpora of three different genres: sermons, private letters and prayers. The first is a corpus of English sermons containing ca. 130,000 words, equally distributed across five different time periods (tenth/eleventh century, fifteenth century, sixteenth century, seventeenth century and late twentieth century); the second is a corpus of private letters containing ca 74,000 words, covering four different periods (fifteenth century, sixteenth century, seventeenth century and late twentieth century). Both the sermon and the letter corpora were slightly altered and supplemented versions of the extracts found in the *Helsinki Corpus* (see Kohnen 2007; the

samples for the late twentieth century were collected from the *London Lund Corpus* and the *British National Corpus*).

Thirdly, I included a corpus of prayers containing ca 59,000 words, covering three time periods (sixteenth century, seventeenth century and late twentieth century). The prayer corpus is part of the prayer section of the *Corpus of English Religious Prose*, which is presently being compiled at the University of Cologne (see Kohnen 2006b).

The time gaps in the letter and prayer corpora reflect the precarious situation with respect to data from earlier stages of the history of English. There are hardly any vernacular private letters before the fifteenth century and the number of vernacular prayers found before 1500 does not seem to add up to form a comparable sub-corpus.

3.2 Manifestations of directives

Following the steps of the proposed methodology, the three corpora were searched “by hand” for all the manifestations of directives. A directive speech act was defined, following Searle (1976), as an attempt by a speaker or writer to get the addressee to carry out an act. Requests which are not directed to the addressee (that is, the audience of a sermon, the addressee of a letter and a prayer) were not included in this investigation¹, neither were directives which were introduced as citations (especially from the Bible). It was assumed that a directive was generally expressed by a (spoken or written) language unit corresponding to a sentence or clause and not by larger stretches of discourse or whole texts.

The manifestations of directives found in the corpora fall into four classes: performatives, imperatives, modal expressions and indirect manifestations (for a more detailed account of these basic classes of directives see Kohnen 2007).

Performatives typically contain a directive speech-act verb in the first person singular or plural indicative active, an object referring to the addressee and the requested act.

- (1) Wherefore we pray and besech thy maiestye, that at no tyme thou suffer vs to be vnthankfull vnto these exceding great benefites, nor yet vnworthy of thy greate merytes,..

(Cuthbert Tunstall, *Certaine godly and deuout prayers*)

The term “imperative” is used in this study in a rather broad sense, covering not only imperative sentences but also so-called periphrastic imperatives and constructions involving inversion and the subjunctive mood. In this broad sense, imperatives may be subdivided into imperatives involving the first, the second and the third person.

First-person imperatives are the so-called periphrastic forms comprising *let us / let's* or Old English *uton we*.

1. With other genres, which include fictional works or reports, the definition also comprises directives which an addressor directs to an addressee in a fictional or reported interaction.

- (2) .. **let vs never gruge** therat but take in good worth and hartely thanke hym as well for aduersytie as for prosperytie.
(Thomas More, Letter to his Wife)

Another imperative form with the first person is the construction involving the subjunctive, mostly with inverted word order (VS).

- (3) .. **be we war** and **trowe we not** þat God hymself made synne.
(Wycliffite Sermons)

Imperative constructions with the second person (both singular and plural) are those sentences which are usually called imperative sentences in the strict sense of the term. They may or may not contain the second-person pronoun. Example (4) is quite remarkable for its accumulation of imperatives, which seems to be typical of prayers.

- (4) Furthermore / though thy most holesome cure be neuer so paynfull vnto vs / yet **go forwarde** therwith / **punisse** / **bete** / **cutte** / **burne** / **distroy** / **bringe to nought dampne** / **cast downe** vnto hell / and **do** what so euer thou wilte that thy wyll onely may be fulfilled and nat ours.
(The pater noster spoken of the Sinner)

Third-person imperatives are constructions with the third-person subjunctive (both singular and plural) and third-person constructions with *let*. Such constructions can be classified as directives if the referent of the third-person subject includes the addressee. This is the case, for example, with general expressions referring to humankind.

- (5) **Let no man think** the worse of Religion, because some are so bold as to despise and deride it. (Tillotson, Sermons)

The third group of directives found in the corpus is formed by modal expressions. These are modal verbs and other lexical items denoting obligation, permission or possibility (for a classification of modal verbs from a contemporary perspective see Quirk et al. 1985: 137).

- (6) **We must** take heed how we scoff at Religion. (Tillotson, Sermons)

Apart from the modal verbs, there are other modal expressions in the data, mostly impersonal or passive constructions which denote obligation and which are often used to express directives. In this group the lexical variation of the different expressions is quite considerable.

- (7) And so eche man by þis lawe **is holdon** ay to loue eche broþur.
(Wycliffite Sermons)

The last and most variable group of directives found in the data are the so-called indirect directives. The indirect directives mainly consist of four groups: speaker-based

declaratives, hearer-based interrogatives, hearer-based conditionals and the rather varied group of “other manifestations”.

Speaker-based declaratives are manifestations with a first-person pronoun plus a verb, expressing the volition or attitude of the speaker vis-à-vis the required act (see Kohnen 2002).

- (8) **I'd like** us to think for a little while this morning just what it means to be a Christian.
(BNC, KN6)
- (9) **I hope** we may meet when you are in the UK next month. (BNC, HD4)

Hearer-based interrogatives are manifestations which question the ability / willingness of the hearer to perform the required act or the fact that the act is a future act of the hearer (see Kohnen 2002).

- (10) Please **could you** thank George most sincerely for his endeavours. (BNC, HD4)

Hearer-based conditionals contain the act required of the addressee in a conditional clause. Here the main clause often contains a positive statement (as in example 11 “ye shuld make me the gladdest man off the world”) or it is completely left out (as in example 12: “I wolde hertly pray you” is not the main clause but a repetition of the request).

- (11) And **yff ye wold be a good etter** off your mete allwaye, that ye might waxe and grow ffast to be a woman, ye shuld make me the gladdest man off the world.
(Stonor Letters)
- (12) Gentyll Cosyn, **yif hit plese you to sende** hem up with such horsis as hit lykith you tosend for me, I wolde hertly pray you.
(Stonor Letters)

There are, of course, many other ways of expressing directives “indirectly”, by stating more or less implicitly that some course of action is necessary, desirable etc.

- (13) .. for **nothinge** in [t]his Liffe **can be so cordiall to me** as shallbe thy vertuous and Ciuill behaviour.
(Katherine Paston, Letters)
- (14) .. **it's time** we sat down for a while and laid aside our burden of care.
(LLC, S.12.1b)

These manifestations of directives are highly variable and extremely difficult to classify in a consistent way (but see the instructive discussion of indirectness in requests by Culpeper and Archer in this volume).

The four basic classes seem to cover most, if not all, the manifestations of directives in the history of English. With all due caution, one could assume that additional genres would probably not yield completely different kinds of directives that fall outside these

classes. This result may come as a relief to the researcher since the initial picture is more homogeneous than one would have expected. On the other hand, the existing classes still involve a significant degree of variability. This applies, above all, to the class of those modal expressions which go beyond the common core of modals and, of course, the “other manifestations” among the indirect directives. In all, it seems that the class of indirect items, in particular, is the least predictable class, with the greatest amount of variability.

3.3 Results: Variability and retrievability

We may get a clearer picture of the degree of variability of the different manifestations if we look at their individual proportions in the different periods investigated, especially if we work out the proportions for those forms which seem to be unpredictable by their very nature (e.g. the indirect manifestations).

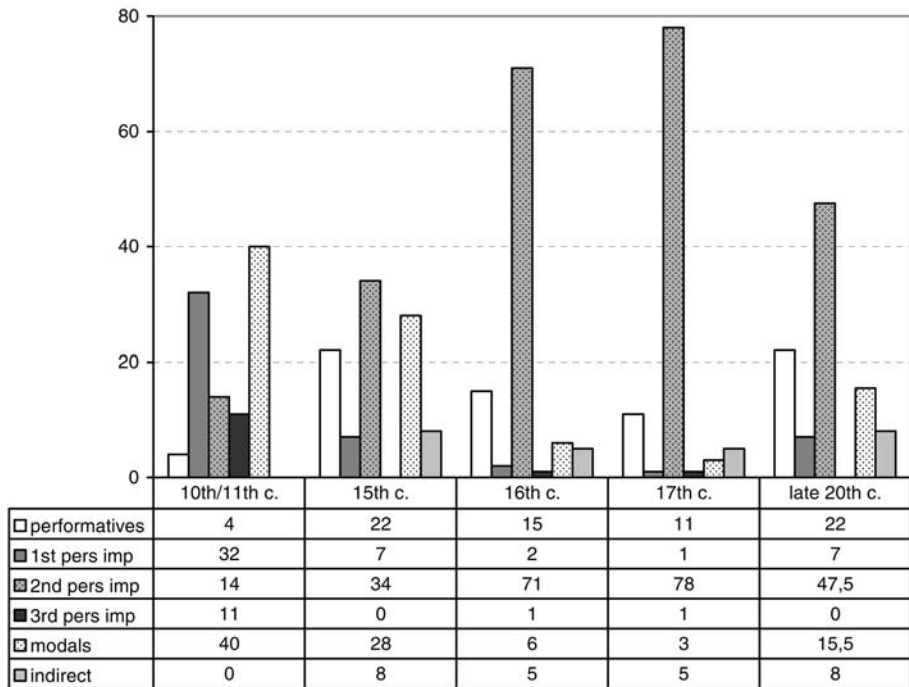


Figure 1. Distribution of manifestations of directives in the data (in per cent)

Figure 1 shows that the proportion of the manifestations which can be defined in terms of form and which can thus be retrieved in automatic computer searches is fairly high. The largest proportions in all periods are attributable to imperatives (mostly second-person imperatives), modals and performatives. It turns out that the proportion of

indirect manifestations does not go beyond eight per cent. Once the different orthographic realisations of the imperative forms, the modal verbs and the directive speech-act verbs are determined, we are left only with the variable class of “other modal expressions”. Thus, if we assign a (rather high) proportion of four per cent to this class, the basically “unpredictable” manifestations (in the three genres investigated) amount to, at most, between ten and twelve per cent. Thus the initial study of three genres suggests that the problem of variability and retrievability of directive speech acts can actually be limited to a certain extent. It remains to be seen, however, whether these proportions change if we add data from other genres.

3.4 Results: Distribution across genres

Another aspect of the results of the present study concerns the distribution of the manifestations across the three genres. This aspect is important because the picture of the general distribution of predictable and thus retrievable manifestations may in fact be quite deceptive. There may be genres in which the conventional realisations prevail, but others may contain a high proportion of idiosyncratic forms. In addition, it is, of course, instructive to learn about possible genre-specific patterns and genre-specific manifestations.

In the following, I will first look at the frequencies of directives in the three genres and then see whether there are any particular distributional patterns which may be genre-specific.

Figure 2 presents the frequencies of directives in sermons, letters and prayers. Here the most noticeable fact is the great discrepancy between the frequencies of directives in sermons and letters on the one hand, and prayers on the other. Whereas frequencies in prayers range between 22 and 30 (in 1,000 words), they range between 2 and 9.6 in sermons and letters. As was shown (see example 4 above), prayers can contain enormous accumulations of directives, especially imperatives. It seems that petitions form the most significant and prevailing element of the genre, setting it apart from other genres, even if they are of an instructional nature (like sermons).

The frequencies in letters are slightly higher than in sermons (except for the last period), but in both genres they follow a decreasing tendency (except for the slight increase in the sermons in the late twentieth century). For example, in the sermons, the frequency in the seventeenth century (2.8) is less than a third of the frequency in the first period (8.5). Since sermons are pieces of religious instruction, this decline may reflect a change in the nature of the sermons (on this see Kohnen 2007). With letters things are different. Private letters are not inherently instructional in their functional profile. Letters will often contain directives, but they may also include long descriptions, congratulations, complaints, etc. Thus, the decline of the frequency may here reflect a changing proportion of directive sections and descriptive or other sections in the letters, and the decrease may not actually suggest that letter writers became more polite or less imposing.

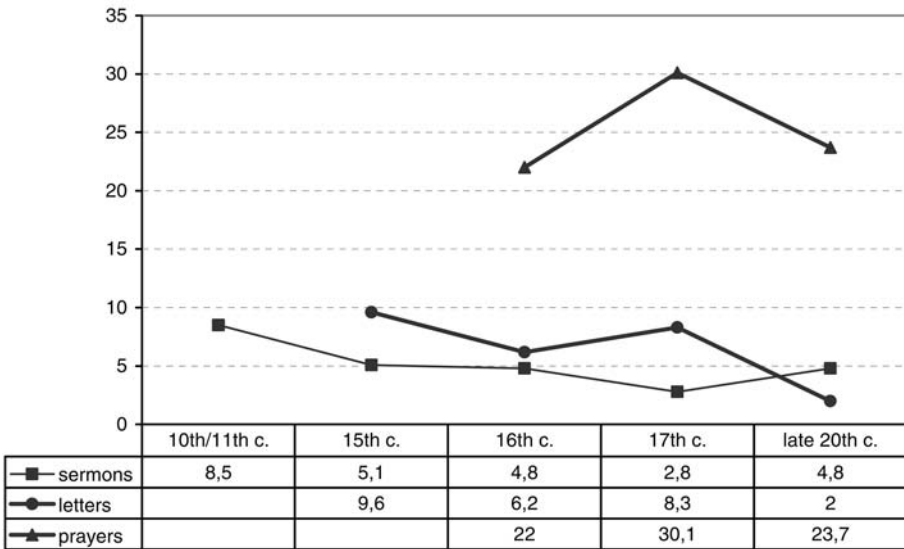


Figure 2. Frequency of directives in sermons, letters and prayers (freq. per 1,000 words)

However the changing frequencies in the three genres are explained, their great variance suggests that a comparison between the different manifestations of directives in the genres is best carried out in terms of proportions.

Figure 3 shows the proportions of manifestations in sermons. Here the largest share is accounted for by modals. Their proportions range between 33 and 53 per cent. They are followed by second-person imperatives (14 to 43 per cent) and first-person imperatives (11 to 32 per cent). Third-person imperatives have smaller shares (0 to 14 per cent). The proportions of performatives and indirect manifestations are negligible, except for the respectable proportion of indirect manifestations in the late twentieth century. So, in all, sermons show quite a mixed picture, which is dominated by modals and second/first-person imperatives, with a growing proportion of indirect speech acts in the last period.

In letters, the situation is quite different. Figure 4 shows that in all periods there is a clear predominance of second-person imperatives (ranging between 38 and 60 per cent). From the fifteenth through the seventeenth century, the second-person imperatives are accompanied by a fairly large proportion of performatives (26 to 37 per cent). The proportion of performatives, however, decreases in the seventeenth century and in the last period no performatives are found. The other type of manifestation which plays a major role in letters is the indirect realisation. Indirect manifestations show a relatively high proportion right from the beginning (14 per cent in the fifteenth century), which grows significantly, so that indirect directives are the second major type of directives in the late twentieth century (36 per cent). Modals and the other types of imperatives do not seem to be important.

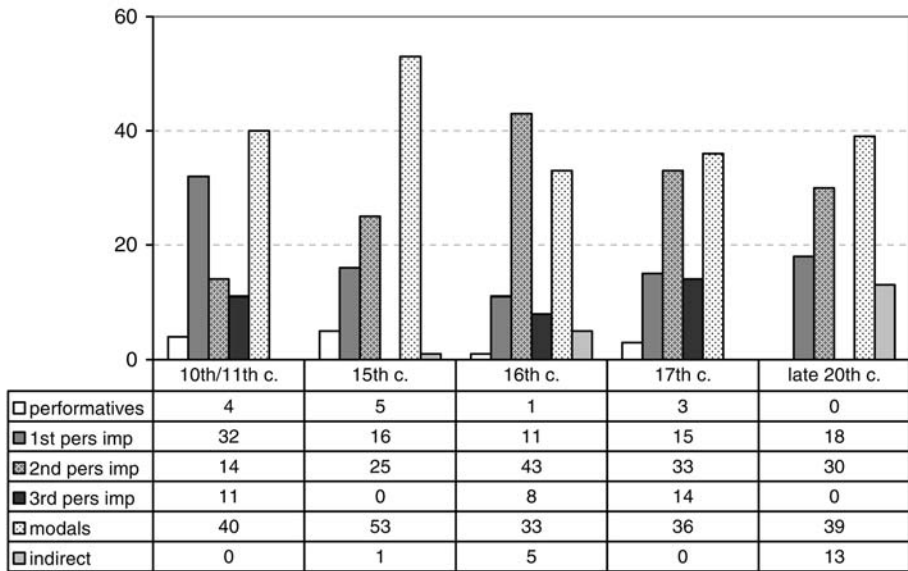


Figure 3. Distribution of manifestations of directives in sermons (in per cent)

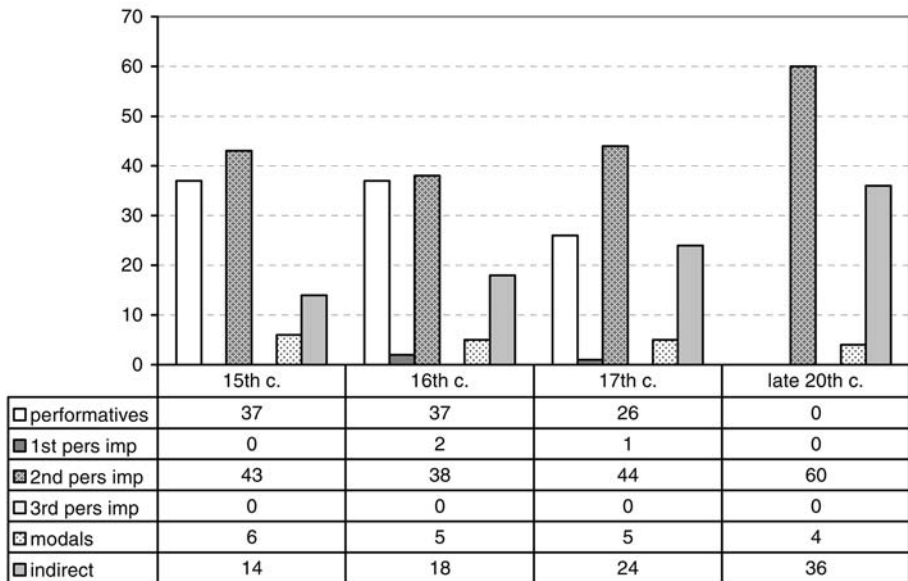


Figure 4. Distribution of manifestations of directives in letters (in per cent)

Thus, letters may be characterised by second-person imperatives, performatives and indirect speech acts. The high proportions of indirect manifestations, especially in the latter periods, make letters a slightly problematic genre with regard to retrievability.

The distribution of manifestations in prayers seems to be quite straightforward. In figure 5 we find an overwhelming predominance of second-person imperatives (which decreases in the last period). The other important manifestation is the performative. The proportions of performatives range between eight and 41 per cent. The other manifestations do not seem to play any significant part. The distribution of directive manifestations in prayers clearly reflects their functional profile (with petitions forming the prominent part of the genre) and their rather fixed, even formulaic diction (which may explain the proportion of performatives).

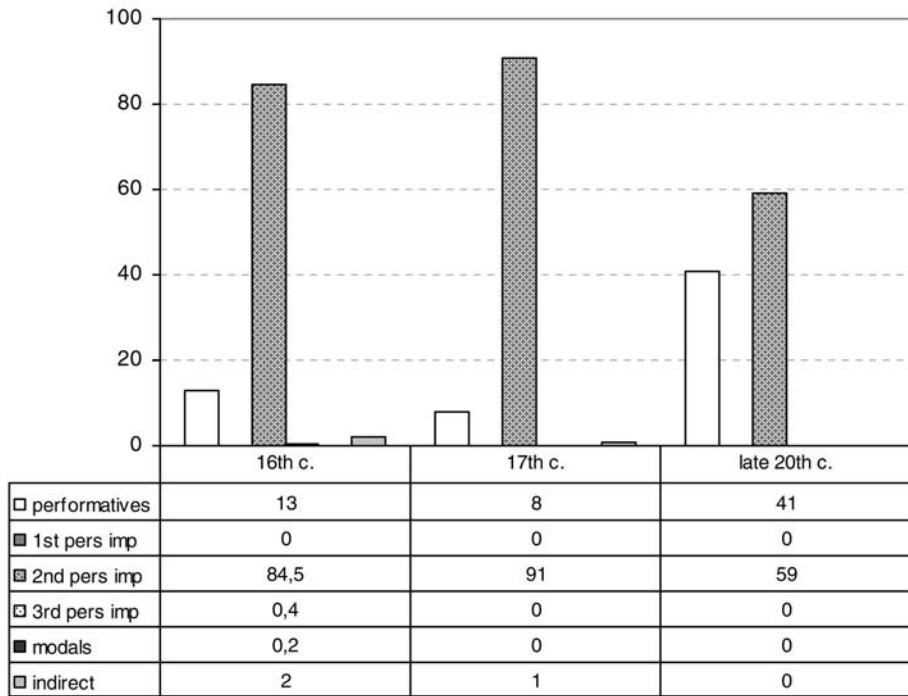


Figure 5. Distribution of manifestations of directives in prayers (in per cent)

It seems that the three genres examined form more or less clearly discernable patterns in the distribution of directives. Sermons are different from letters and prayers in that they show a mixed picture of modals, second- and first-person imperatives. Quite surprisingly, letters and prayers share a few similarities (the prevalence of second-person imperatives and performatives). However, prayers have a far higher general frequency of directives and a far larger proportion of second-person imperatives. In addition,

letters are characterised by a large proportion of indirect manifestations, which makes them similar to sermons in the late twentieth century.

3.5 Extending the analysis

The next step in the analysis was the extension of the data included. This task turned out to be fairly labour-intensive, especially when large corpora (like the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus*) were involved. Firstly, it seems rather difficult to extract common manifestations (like second-person imperatives) in large corpora which are not tagged. Secondly, once the large numbers of examples have been collected, it is even more time-consuming to analyse them. Thus the first steps of the extended analysis were confined to rather specific manifestations which would not yield copious numbers of items.

The first examples refer to three of the four case studies on Old English directives which are introduced and explained in greater detail in the chapter on Old English speech acts in this volume. They concern the so-called “other modal expressions”, that is, mostly impersonal or passive constructions which denote obligation (see 7 for a Middle English example; in Old English they are usually constructions with *neodþearf*), first-person imperatives (in Old English – apart from inverted constructions – constructions with *uton*) and second-person modals (in Old English mainly constructions with *þu scealt / ge sculon*). The first two constructions were remarkably frequent, the latter exceptionally rare in the Old English section of the sermon corpus, quite in contrast to the following periods (see, for example, the proportion of first-person imperatives in the tenth/eleventh century as opposed to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in figure 3). Now the question arises whether this frequency (i.e. rareness) was typical of Old English sermons or of the whole of Old English.

The *neodþearf*-constructions were studied in all prose texts of the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus*; the other two constructions were studied in the Old English section of the *Helsinki Corpus* (see the chapter on Old English directives for a more detailed account of the results). The remarkable outcome was that all three constructions seem to form genre-specific or at least domain-specific patterns. The *neodþearf*-construction is typical of Old English sermons and homilies, the *uton*-constructions are mostly found in religious instruction and the constructions with *þu scealt / ge sculon* are typical of writings stemming from a secular and / or Germanic world. The Old English data strongly suggest that certain manifestations of directives were reserved for specific uses in certain genres and domains.

Another point relates to the further development of the first-person imperatives in Early Modern English. These constructions are mostly combinations with *let us* or *let's*, with proportions of eleven and 15 per cent in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries respectively (see figure 3). In private letters and prayers they seem to be extremely rare (see figures 4 and 5). Now the question arises as to how this picture relates to other genres in the Early Modern period. Are first-person imperatives with *let us* and *let's* fairly “frequent” in sermons compared with other Early Modern text types?

In order to find a preliminary answer to this question, the three Early Modern English sections of the *Helsinki Corpus* were searched for these constructions. It turned out that directives with *let us / let's* do not seem to have been very frequent in Early Modern English: 88 items were found in all three sections, yielding a frequency of 1.7 (in 10,000 words) in sections 1 and 2, and a frequency of 1.4 in section 3.² The distribution across genres within the different subsections is extremely variable, with great fluctuations and fairly low numbers in the individual genres. But when all the frequencies of the three subsections are added up, a more robust picture emerges (see table 1).

Table 1. Directives with *let us / let's* in the Early Modern part of the *Helsinki Corpus* (frequency per 10,000 words, incidence in square brackets)

Handbook (33,660 w)	4.8 [16]
Comedy (35,120 w)	4.3 [15]
Sermon (32,240 w)	4.3 [14]
Philosophy (25,590 w)	3.5 [9]
Bible (43,420 w)	2.5 [11]
Education (32,980 w)	2.1 [7]
Trial (43,960 w)	1.4 [6]
Fiction (36,080 w)	1.4 [5]
Priv. Lett. (35,370 w)	0.8 [3]
Biography (31,840 w)	0.6 [2]

Table 1 shows that the genre of sermons is among the three genres with the highest frequencies of the construction (4.8 in handbooks, 4.3 in comedies and 4.3 in sermons). There is a “middle” section with philosophical (3.5) and educational (2.1) treatises and the Bible (2.5), followed by genres where the construction seems to be fairly rare (0.6 to 1.4). And, of course, there are quite a few genres included in the *Helsinki Corpus* where the construction does not occur at all (for example, diary, travelogue, history, official correspondence).

This picture is quite instructive in that it locates the initial findings about sermons, private letters and prayers within a more comprehensive assembly of Early Modern English genres. It suggests that *let's*-constructions are only frequent in a few genres, most of which can be called interactive.³

In a further study, I focussed on the frequency of the directive performatives. One of the astonishing results in the pilot study on prayers was the high frequency of

2. Directives with *let* as a full verb in the sense of ‘cause’ or ‘allow’ were, of course, not included here (for example, “For Gammer Gurtons nedle sake, let vs haue a plaudytie.” (‘cause us to receive applause’) (*Gammer Gurtons Nedle*))

3. Handbooks were interactive because the setting was usually a dialogue. The same applies to the text excerpt in the field of philosophy.

directive performatives in the two periods covered. Quite interestingly, the initial letter corpus contains a similarly high frequency of performatives as well (see figure 6). So, during the Middle English and Early Modern English periods a high frequency of performatives seems to be a common feature of both letters and prayers. Would this finding be borne out by larger corpora?

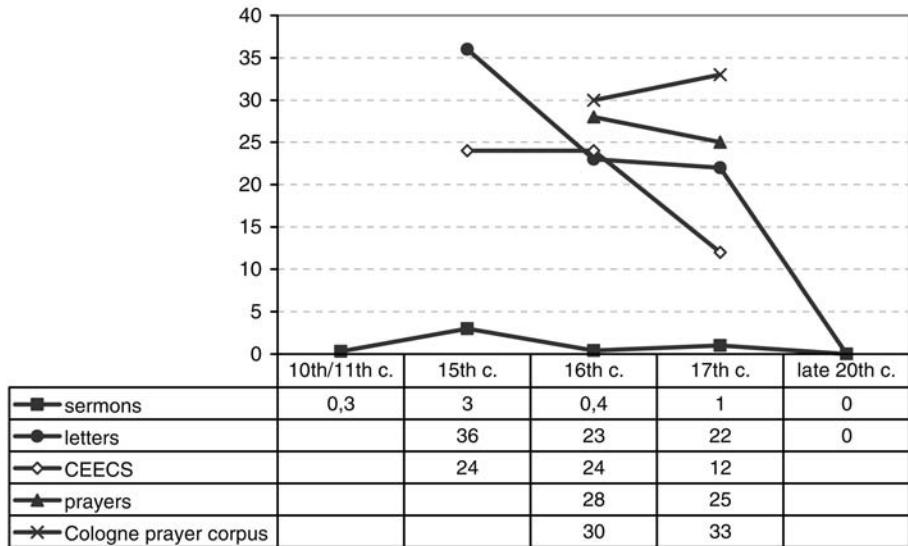


Figure 6. Frequency of directive performatives in sermons, letters and prayers (freq. per 10,000 words)

A search for directive performatives in the larger version of the prayer corpus (containing ca 260,000 words) confirmed this high frequency for prayers. In fact, the frequency found here was even higher (see figure 6, *Cologne prayer corpus*). For letters, I used the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence Sampler (CEECS)* with ca 450,000 words.⁴ On the whole, the *CEECS* data confirm the high frequency of performatives in letters. But, whereas the frequency for the sixteenth century (nearly) matches the frequency found in the initial letter corpus, the frequencies for the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries diverge. One reason for the difference in the fifteenth century may be the fact that *CEECS1* contains letters from both the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries. Here the letters could not be analysed separately, according to the respective century. In addition, the discrepancy both in the fifteenth and in the seventeenth centuries might be assigned to the fact that *CEECS* contains both official and private letters, whereas the initial corpus was mostly based on the private letters contained in the

4. On *CEECS* see Nurmi (1999). In figure 6 the frequencies given for *CEECS* are based on *CEECS1* for the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and on *CEECS2* for the seventeenth century.

Helsinki Corpus. However the divergence is explained, the data basically confirm the partial similarity between prayers and letters (both genres contain far more performatives than sermons do), but while the number of performatives found changes for letters (decreasing over time), for prayers it seems to remain fairly stable.

4. Conclusions

The initial study of directives, based on the suggested genre-based bottom-up methodology, has shown some interesting results: first of all, the data provided by the three genres yielded a relatively consistent picture, where the majority of manifestations were provided by a few common types: imperatives, performatives, and, in part, modals. To a large extent the forms of these manifestations are predictable and thus retrievable. It is quite unlikely that more data will introduce new common types.

The largest problematic class of manifestations are indirect directives. It seems that both their frequency and variability increase over the centuries. The main problem here is, on the one hand, to set the limits to their “inferrability”, that is, to define conditions under which an utterance that contains neither imperative, nor modal, nor performative can be taken as a directive, and, on the other hand, to detect patterns of indirect usage, that is, find out what are the frequently used indirect manifestations. But, despite the growing proportion of indirect manifestations, the general situation with directives appears to be relatively straightforward. This may be due to their fairly “simple” nature when compared to other, more complex speech acts (see, for example, the study of compliments by Jucker, Schneider, Taavitsainen and Breustedt in this volume).

With regard to the distribution of directives, the study found ample evidence of genre-specific profiles in the three genres and even genre-specific manifestations. It also showed that certain genres (for example, private letters) contain a larger proportion of “non-predictable” manifestations than others. This certainly makes their analysis more difficult.

It is quite striking that specific manifestations do not seem to occur at all in certain genres (for example, first-person imperatives in prayers). On the other hand, the study has also shown that some manifestations are so common that they can hardly be called genre-specific. This is certainly true for second-person imperatives. The evidence of the present data suggests that second-person imperatives may be something like the unmarked manifestation of directives. Not only are they the most frequent realisation (except in the Old English period) but they can also be used from both a subordinate position (as in prayers) and from a superordinate position (as in sermons and in many letters). In this, imperatives seem to be different from most other manifestations of directives.

In all, the proposed methodology has proved to be a useful tool for the corpus-based historical speech-act analysis. It seems particularly important for determining the range of the manifestations of a speech act and genre-specific patterns in the history of English.

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