ILLUMINATING INNOVATIVE AND PROMISING PATHS FOR HISTORICAL SOCIOLINGUISTICS

EXPLORING FUTURE PATHS FOR HISTORICAL SOCIOLINGUISTICS

Tanja Säily, Arja Nurmi, Minna Palander-Collin and Anita Auer (eds.)

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The book *Exploring Future Paths for Historical Sociolinguistics* is one of the recently published volumes in the John Benjamins Publishing Company's book series *Advances in Historical Sociolinguistics*. As we learn from the editors Tanja Säily, Arja Nurmi, Minna Palander-Collin and Anita Auer in the introductory chapter *The future of historical sociolinguistics?*, the main inspiration for this volume was the pioneering work of the Finnish linguist Terttu Nevalainen in the field of historical sociolinguistics, and this inspiration is shared not only by the editors, but also by the other authors in this book. More precisely, the most important impetus was Nevalainen's essay *What are historical sociolinguistics?*, published in 2015, where she introduced *layered simultaneity* and *informational maximalism* as key concepts in historical sociolinguistic research.

In addition to the introductory chapter, the book comprises eleven contributions, organized by their main focus (method, data or theory) into three separate – but often overlapping – subsections. These contributions cover different languages and language varieties (e.g. Finnish, Dutch, American and British English), as well as different periods (from the 15th century to the present day). They often combine quantitative and qualitative analysis, focus on micro- and macro-level, and engage in distant and close reading, ensuring a truly multidisciplinary approach by introducing inspiring insights from other (sub)-disciplines.

The first part of the book, entitled *Methodological innovations*, consists of four contributions which aim at improving quantitative approaches in historical sociolinguistics by introducing statistical and

visualising methods which could be useful and relevant to the field, as well as by exploring other methods which could be drawn from related disciplines and which could contribute to a better understanding and interpretation of sociohistorical data.

Tanja Säily, Turo Vartiainen and Harri Siirtola explore the usefulness of part-of-speech (POS) annotation in studying language variation and change as well as genre evolution, discussing in their contribution the genre of personal correspondence on the basis of the *Parsed Corpus of Early English Correspondence* (1410-1681). Investigating the frequencies of certain POS categories (such as nouns, adjectives, prepositions, *wh*-words, complementisers, coordinating conjunctions and punctuation) in the chosen corpus, the authors have confirmed the findings of previous studies which have shown gender differences in POS ratios, but here they have included not only the metadata on gender but also the metadata on social rank and the relationship between the sender and the recipient of the letter. They conclude that POS ratios can be a useful tool in the study of linguistic complexity but stress the need of complementing such analyses with other data.

Susan Fitzmaurice, Justyna A. Robinson, Marc Alexander, Iona C. Hine, Seth Mehl and Fraser Dallachy present the Linguistic DNA project, which strives to develop techniques and methods for the investigation of concepts and ideas in the Early Modern printed English, based on the corpus of *Early English Books Online* (1473-1700). The project is presented through three case studies corresponding to the project's three research themes, which are delineated by the authors as the following: historical and social contexts of conceptual change; lexical semantic relationships within conceptual structures; lexicalisation pressure. Instead of a conclusion, prospects of using Linguistic DNA tools in historical sociolinguistic research are sketched in the final part of this contribution.

Helen Baker, Vaclav Brezina and Tony McEnery investigate the changes in discourse of the word *Ireland* in British parliamentary debates recorded in the *UK Hansard Corpus* (1803-2005), using two visualization methods (*Meaning Fluctuation Analysis* and sparklines) to determine when precisely the change in discourse occurred. The authors have concentrated on two troughs shown by the MFA analysis as two points in time when major change in meaning occurred. These two troughs coincide with two major historical events (the Great Famine in the 1840s and the establishment of the Irish Republic in 1922),

which is not necessarily related to the frequency of the word mention, but rather to the shift in patterns of collocation. In the conclusion, the advantages and limitations of applying the MFA analysis in the study of very large historical corpus data are summarized.

Minna Nevala and Anni Sairio focus their attention on the representations of discord in the correspondence of the eighteenth-century English gentry. By conducting a qualitative analysis of the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence* and the *Bluestocking Corpus*, they investigate the ways in which linguistic variation is linked to socio-cultural norms, i.e. how upper classes negotiated conflict situations, placing in the centre of their analysis the letters of the genteel literati: Hester (Thrale) Piozzi, Erasmus Darwin, Samuel Crisp, Elizabeth Montagu, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Frances Burney.

The second part of the book, entitled *New data for historical sociolinguistic research*, comprises three contributions which explore hitherto un- or under-explored datasets by making use of computerized corpora, which allow for a more extensive and nuanced historical sociolinguistic analysis, often followed by fresh theoretical insights.

Taru Nordlund and Ritva Pallaskallio aim at shedding additional light on and providing fresh insight into the complex process of language planning in nineteenth-century Finland. They use three types of data: the so-called rural letters, or newsletters sent to Finnish newspapers by their readers; visible meta-level discussion on Finnish language (grammars, newspapers and language guides); nineteenth-century Finnish newspapers. The rural correspondence is especially interesting from the linguistic point of view in the light of changes and corrections made by the editor before they were published. Based on the analysis of the essive and illative cases, the authors of this contribution were able to notice evidence of invisible language planning, as well as to show discrepancies between visible language planning and morphological changes attested in the examined data.

Andreas Krogull, Gijsbert Rutten and Marijke J. van der Wal concentrate on the process of language planning in the Netherlands around the beginning of the 19th century, offering the first corpus-based study of the neuter relative pronoun in historical Dutch. The focus is put on the neuter relative pronoun in the singular in the subject and the object position. The authors analyse variation and change in the ego-documents covering two periods (the second half of the 18th

and the first half of the 19ᵗʰ century), seven regions and two genders compiled in the *Going Dutch Corpus*. They conclude that genre is the crucial factor that explains the usage patterns of pronouns.

Samuli Kaislaniemi, Mel Evans, Teo Juvonen and Anni Sairio choose to shift the accent from printed to hand-written texts and from public to private spelling practice in the historical study of English spelling, by placing in the centre of their attention almost 12,000 personal letters in English from the *Corpus of Early English Correspondence* (1400-1800) and comparing the findings with the data from smaller manuscript-based corpora afterwards. Their goal is to determine the interaction of the macro-level orthographic trends and the private spelling practices on the micro-level based on the analysis of consonant and vowel variation (the spelling of *always*, *-ful*, *friend*, *believe*, *receive*), which are then reviewed in the light of social variables (age, gender and social rank).

The third and final part of the book, entitled *Theory: Bridging gaps, new challenges*, brings to the reader's attention fresh and new theoretical insights introduced through different approaches applied in the final four contributions.

Martin Hilpert focuses on the comparison of historical sociolinguistics and construction grammar pointing out their most important theoretical and methodological convergences and divergences. He believes that these two (sub)disciplines should engage in a closer collaboration, and thus argues in favour of a combined approach shaped at their intersection. This approach is then illustrated on the basis of the *sarcastic much?* construction followed by the author's overview of its advantages and limitations.

Bridget L. Jankowski and Sali A. Tagliamonte conducted a variationist sociolinguistic analysis of the Ottawa Valley English, a rural regional dialect spoken in the watershed of the Ottawa River, Canada. Recent studies report it to be in the process of disappearing, which is the main reason why this dialect is chosen for the analysis as an excellent opportunity to study the general process of dialect dissipation and concentration. The authors focus on two key grammatical features: verbal *-s* in the verb BE with third person plural subjects, and the preterit *come*, based on two subsamples of collected data (1975-1980 and 2012-2013). Their results are very interesting as they tell a different story about the status of the two analysed vernacular features: the first one is obviously under threat, being used only in cer-

tain fossilized contexts, while the latter is increasing in frequency across the informants' lifespan in both sub-samples.

Lieselotte Anderwald's research is based on a collection of nineteenth-century British and U.S. grammars, called the *Collection of Nineteenth-Century Grammars*, which comprises 258 grammar books published between 1800 and 1900. The author concentrates on four "vernacular universals": multiple negation, adverbs without *-ly*, *you was* vs. *you were*, *there is/there was* with plural subjects, investigating the relation between their actual usage on the one hand and their status among prescriptive grammarians on the other. In the final section of this paper, the analysis of the distribution of epithets is added as a reflection of the kind and degree of stigmatization of the four mentioned features.

Mikko Laitinen, Jonas Lundberg, Magnus Levin and Alexander Lakaw show how present-day social media can be used in (historical) sociolinguistics, conducting their research on a sample of nearly 200,000 informants, i.e. by constructing a big and rich database of geo-tagged Twitter micro-blogs from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. The authors aim at testing whether the social network model of linguistic change elaborated by James Milroy and Lesley Milroy can also be applied to big datasets, focusing on the diffusion of linguistic innovations.

The present volume *Exploring Future Paths for Historical Sociolinguistics* has successfully showed current trends, ideas, advances and challenges in the field of historical sociolinguistics, especially with regard to the rapidly developing world of digital humanities. As accurately diagnosed by the editors in the introductory chapter, and vividly proven by the authors of the following eleven chapters, historical sociolinguists (but also linguists in general) will have to make a stronger effort towards changing their mindset and acquiring a broader set of skills that will enable them to engage in truly multidisciplinary work. This imperative is especially challenging when applied to smaller national philologies, which often lack adequate resources to conduct innovative and competitive research, but this book surely does give an excellent state-of-the-art overview of contemporary European historical sociolinguistics and lights the path which should be followed if one wants to advance the field.

Ivana Eterović