

Advances in Historical Sociolinguistics

5

# Changing Genre Conventions in Historical English News Discourse

EDITED BY

Birte Bös and Lucia Kornexl

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This volume explores the dynamics of genre conventions in historical English news discourse. The contributions cover a wide spectrum of news writing and publication formats: from *corantos* to modern tabloids, from prototypical hard news stories and crime reports to more specialised genres such as medical and scientific news, advertisements, death notices and spoof news. Investigating linguistic, pragmatic and social factors, the authors trace the triggers, mechanisms and agents of change that have shaped genre conventions in historical news discourse from the 17th century to the present day.

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Bös & Kornexl

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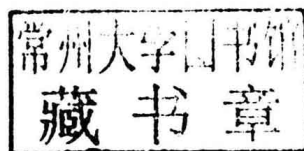
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# *Advances in Historical Sociolinguistics (AHS)*

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Over the last three decades, historical sociolinguistics has developed into a mature and challenging field of study that focuses on language users and language use in the past. The social motivation of linguistic variation and change continues at the forefront of the historical sociolinguistic enquiry, but current research does not stop there. It extends from social and regional variation in language use to its various communicative contexts, registers and genres, and includes issues in language attitudes, policies and ideologies. One of the main stimuli for the field comes from new digitized resources and large text corpora, which enable the study of a much wider social coverage than before. Historical sociolinguists use variationist and dialectological research tools and techniques, perform pragmatic and social network analyses, and adopt innovative approaches from other disciplines. The series publishes monographs and thematic volumes, in English, on different languages and topics that contribute to our understanding of the relations between the individual, language and society in the past.

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## **Volume 5**

Changing Genre Conventions in Historical English News Discourse  
Edited by Birte Bös and Lucia Kornexl

## Preface

This volume comprises a selection of the papers presented at the Third International Conference on Historical News Discourse (CHINED III) held in Rostock (Germany), 17–19 May 2012. Like its two predecessors, the meeting brought together international scholars in the field of historical news discourse. The first conference in this series, CHINED I, was initiated by Nicholas Brownlees and took place in Florence, 2–3 September 2004. Its proceedings were published in *News discourse in Early Modern Britain* (ed. Nicholas Brownlees, Bern: Lang, 2004). The contributions to the follow-up meeting, held in Ittingen (Switzerland), 31 August – 1 September 2007 and hosted by Andreas Jucker, appeared in a volume entitled *Early Modern English news discourse: Newspapers, pamphlets and scientific news discourse* (ed. Andreas H. Jucker, Amsterdam/Philadelphia: Benjamins, 2009).

With CHINED IV, held in Helsinki, 5–7 June 2014, and CHINED V to take place in Porto, 11–13 June 2015, we can safely say that this conference series has developed into an established tradition, continuing to provide a forum for expert discussion and exchange among researchers who investigate the multi-faceted nature of historical news discourse. Up-to-date information relating to past, present and future work in the field can be found on the CHINED News website (<http://www.chinednews.com/>).

We would like to thank the contributors of this volume for their co-operation, and the anonymous reviewers for their valuable suggestions. We are also very grateful for the continued support by the series editors, Terttu Nevalainen and Marijke van der Wal, and for the assistance we received from Anke de Looper at John Benjamins. Further thanks go to our colleagues Nuria Hernández, Alexander Haselow, and Theresa Wannisch for commenting on previous versions of the manuscript. Last but not least, with their careful attention and devotion to detail Johann Schedlinski and Michael Wentker have been of immense help in preparing the volume for publication.

Essen/Rostock, December 2014  
The Editors





# Introduction

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News discourse comes in many different shapes, both diachronically and synchronically. CHINED (the conference series on historical news discourse and the research network resulting from it) has therefore made it its policy to adopt a broad perspective on news discourse, which allows for the integration of a variety of genres and expressional modes associated with the domain of news (cf. [www.chinednews.com](http://www.chinednews.com)). This openness for the diversity and complexity of news in form, structure and content is reflected in the proceedings of the first two CHINED conferences (ed. Brownlees 2004 and Jucker 2009) and has also guided the selection of papers for this volume. The types of texts covered range from prototypical kinds of news discourse such as hard news and crime reports to more specialised news categories such as medical news, death notices, advertisements and fictional texts. Focussing on *Changing Genre Conventions in Historical English News Discourse*, all the contributions share a common interest in the nature and the dynamics of such conventions.

It is well known that the term ‘genre’ has diverse conceptualisations across and even within disciplines.<sup>1</sup> However, the different linguistic approaches do have a common core which we rely on here. As pointed out by Diller (2001: 31), they all conceptualise ‘genre’ as a “fuzzy, prototypically structured category membership of which is a matter of more-or-less rather than either-or”. There is also a common assumption that “genres as forms of semiotic practice are socially based” (Solin 2011: 119).

Various attempts have been made to differentiate ‘genre’ from other concepts such as ‘text-type’ (for example in the early work by Biber 1988), or ‘register’ and ‘style’ (Biber & Conrad 2009). Such distinctions, which are based on the differentiation between language-internal, micro- and macrostructural features and external features, might be useful for analytic purposes (cf. Taavitsainen 2001: 141). Yet, in actual language use we can hardly separate internal features

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1. See, for example, Ljung (2000), Diller (2001), Moessner (2001), and Solin (2011) for insightful summaries of different linguistic approaches to genre.

related to linguistic form and external features related to communicative functions and social contexts (cf. Diller 2001: 15). It is thus their interaction that is specifically explored in many of the contributions to this volume.

Given the special focus of this collection, the dynamic nature of genres, their intertextual and pragmatic connections,<sup>2</sup> and their potential for change are major objects of investigation. Looking at genres as “the locus of linguistic change” (Diller 2001: 31), the papers aim to capture traces of hybridity and indications of categorial shift, which have been acknowledged as defining qualities of genres in recent research (Solin 2011: 131). Searching for built-in dynamic components and outward moving factors, the authors investigate triggers, mechanisms and agents of change that have affected genre conventions in historical English news discourse from the 17th century to the present day.

The contributions share a data-driven approach; all of them rely on material from the ever-growing electronic archives of historical news discourse and established corpora such as the *Florence Early English Newspaper Corpus*, the *Lancaster Newsbooks Corpus*, the *Zurich English Newspapers Corpus*, the *Rostock Newspaper Corpus*, the *Corpus of Early English Medical Texts* and the *Corpus of English Death Notices*. The studies benefit from a combination of quantitative and qualitative research perspectives, which allows for fine-grained insights into the material under investigation.

The dynamics of genre conventions are viewed from different angles that are reflected in the structure of this volume. **Part I, “The formation of public news discourse and metadiscursive terminology”**, sets the scene by exploring fluctuating shapes of news presentation as reflected in the use of domain-specific key terms. Both contributions in this part methodologically draw on the approach of corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS). They relate observations from previous linguistic and socio-historical studies with corpus-based data, thus refining research design and results.

Nicholas Brownlees’ contribution provides a close-up on the early stages of periodical news writing, when genre conventions were still to evolve and news writers looked for models to be used and adapted. Brownlees investigates editorial metadiscourse from 1620, when the first coranto appeared, to 1695, when the lapse of the Licensing Act reformed the English news landscape. He focusses on nominal forms used in expressions like *in our former booke, a continuation of more news*, and *this intelligence*. This kind of metadiscourse, chosen by newsmakers to relate to their own publications and to the news they presented, is assigned to three major semantic fields: publication types, modes of presenting news, and

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2. Cf. Bakhtin’s notion of ‘genre’ (1953/1986), which stresses the interaction between different types of texts and their authors and audiences.

concepts of ‘news’. Linking the use of editorial metadiscourse to the socio-historical conditions of the time, the paper reveals newsmakers’ ideas, ambitions and strategies regarding news presentation in the formative years.

Covering a wider diachronic scope, **Birte Bös’** investigation of British news stories sheds light on changing journalistic practices during the past three centuries. She examines the metadiscursive use of key terms such as *news*, *advice*, and *report* and their specific modifications, which illustrate contemporary conceptualisations of news and news values. The usage of terms like *letter*, *express*, *journal*, and *telegram/telegraph* reflects changes in the news gathering and production procedures and gives evidence of the impact of technological innovations. Agents of news processing are made visible by key terms such as *correspondent* and *editor*. Bös shows that the sets of concepts investigated underwent systematic change at the end of the 19th century, which correlates with the beginnings of modern journalism.

Different fashions of news presentation and diversifications in referencing practices and readership appeal are discussed in **Part II, “Changing modes of reference and shifts in audience orientation”**. As the four papers in this section show, early and late Modern English news writers and advertisers draw on a variety of linguistic strategies to anchor their texts in time and space, to give them a specific personal appeal, and to adjust them to certain target groups.

**Claudia Claridge** examines diachronic trends in the realisation of temporal and spatial references in British newspapers from the 17th to the 20th century. Her data from five time samples illustrate the impact of genres such as letters, chronicle texts and official proclamations, whose referencing conventions were important role models especially for early newspapers. Looking at deictic and non-deictic time and place indicators, Claridge finds a more volatile development than one might have expected. After a preference for deictic forms in the early stages, a trend towards more precise, non-deictic reference could be observed in the 18th-century samples, which reversed again in the later periods investigated. Claridge’s discussion of these developments links up with earlier research results (such as Biber’s 2001 observations) and clarifies the relation of her findings to shifts in news publication processes and rhythms.

**Minna Palander-Collin’s** study explores the forms and functions of person-mention, i.e. indications of the advertiser, the audience or other persons, in advertisements from two London newspapers. She observes a clear decrease of person-mention in the period under investigation (1785–1880). Whereas in the late 18th and early 19th centuries advertisers were visibly creating a deferential relation to their potential customers, often following letter-like conventions, person-mention proved to be almost non-existent in the data from the end of the 19th century. Palander-Collin’s contribution illustrates once more that such



linguistic developments can only be understood in relation to broader societal developments, cultural, political and commercial changes and, intertwined with that, changing genre expectations and models.

The third paper in this part discusses transformations of death notices during the 19th and 20th centuries. For her analysis, **Sarah Borde** compiled a corpus of 400 death notices published between 1801 and 2012. She uses a prototype approach to portray the macro- and micro-structure of these announcements. Her diachronic study shows that whereas some structural elements were used quite consistently throughout the period investigated, others changed their status as obligatory or optional components of such texts. The actual linguistic realisation of the structural elements reveals opposing trends: towards increasing precision, e.g. in the case of date references, and towards increasing vagueness, e.g. regarding the circumstances of death. Clearly, the genre conventions of death notices are not only influenced by the institutional frame of the specific newspaper; they are also highly sensitive to changing cultural and social norms.

**Irma Taavitsainen** compares the presentation of medical news in three periodicals from the late 17th and early 18th centuries catering for different readerships: *The Philosophical Transactions for the Royal Society*, *The Edinburgh Medical Journal*, and *The Gentleman's Magazine*. Based on a series of keyword analyses, Taavitsainen points out important differences between professional medical discourse, with determined attempts to establish scientific standards, and lay medical discourse, with pronounced traces of personalisation and privateness. Yet, her study also shows that both professional and lay practices did not stand in opposition, but overlapped and interacted, and were, in fact, closely related in the period under investigation.

In Part III, “Transgressing boundaries and shifting styles”, phenomena of intertextuality, medial shift and genre transfer are investigated. The papers in this part exemplify and discuss publication-specific realisations and interconnections of news reporting, gradual changes in modern news discourse towards more speech-like structures and strategic exploitations of genre conventions through satirising them.

**Elisabetta Cecconi** explores the construction of murder reports in four co-existing publication types in the 17th century: broadside ballads, occasional pamphlets, newsbooks, and an early newspaper (*The London Gazette*). She discusses layout features, discourse structure and lexis of the proto-lead, and authorial comments, metadiscursive elements and aspects of factuality in the body copy, in order to demonstrate the formal and functional diversity of crime news as well as their similarities in the different publications. Generally, Cecconi observes an increasing degree of factuality and precision towards the end of the 17th century, and with that a substantial change in news values and ideology.

**Alexander Haselow's** comparison of hard news from 1900 and 2013 in a quality and a popular paper focusses on the use of syntactic patterns typically associated with conceptual orality: conjunctions as extra-clausal linking devices, disintegrated clausal units, and syntactic fragments loosely attached to a completed syntagma. Haselow's data indicate an increasing preference for speech-like syntactic patterns in hard news reports, which lends further evidence to the much-discussed trends towards colloquialisation and informalisation. The author points out important cognitive implications of the increasing use of speech-like syntax in public news discourse and emphasises the stimulating effect of new electronic media in this process.

Finally, the paper by **Isabel Ermida** explores the playful subversion of genre conventions in Mark Twain's famous spoof news. Applying her Model of News Satire, Ermida anatomises Twain's skilful parody of structural and stylistic conventions of news presented with a sensational touch. In addition to this intertextual component, Twain's stories are shown to exhibit the critical and comic components vital for the construction of news satire. It is the interaction of these elements that make Twain's stories successful and, indeed, the archetype of the genre of news satire.

All the papers assembled in the present volume are united by an overall concern to provide state-of-the-art analyses of their subject that contribute to a theoretically and empirically grounded understanding of generic changes in English news discourse during the early and later modern period. Though they focus on different forms and aspects of historical news discourse, their results combine to form a strong plea for an integrated approach that tries to capture the ways in which linguistic, pragmatic and social factors interact in shaping genre styles. By its very nature, news is a societal phenomenon couched in linguistic form. It is the aim of this collection to enhance our understanding of the complex relations of language, society, and changing genre conventions.

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