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Transatlantic Perspectives on Late Modern English

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MARINA DOSSENA

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Marina Dossena
Università degli Studi di Bergamo

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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 4

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Bergamo, 15 September 2014

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Introduction

Marina Dossena
University of Bergamo, Italy

1. Transatlantic Perspectives on Late Modern English

In 1781 John Witherspoon, a graduate of Edinburgh University and one of the signers of the American Declaration of Independence, first used the word 'Americanism' in the 9 May issue of the *Pennsylvania Journal* (*Oxford English Dictionary*, henceforth OED, s.v. *Americanism*, n., 1a). He employed this term to indicate "an use of phrases or terms, or a construction of sentences, even among persons of rank and education, different from the use of the same terms or phrases, or the construction of similar sentences, in Great Britain." Witherspoon's clear indication that such specificity of usage was found "even among persons of rank and education" stresses the fact that geographical variation transcended social classes and levels of schooling. In a similar vein, eighteenth-century Scottish commentators had also identified educated forms of usage which were nonetheless geographically marked; in 1779 Alexander Scot claimed:

> That the language of Edinburgh is not nearer the language of London than it was a century ago, [...], will irrefragably appear from the following letter, which fairly paints the present Caledonian English of the college, the pulpit, and the bar.
>
> (*The Contrast*, quoted by Jones 1993: 102)

The reference to education ("the college"), the church ("the pulpit") and the law ("the bar") – that is, the three areas in which Scotland had preserved its specificity after the Union of Parliaments in 1707, indicates that the continuation of linguistic distinctiveness had strong cultural associations. As a matter of fact, Witherspoon added that the new word "is exactly similar in its formation and signification to the word Scotticism", thus establishing an important link with a linguistic label that had been in use for over a century, though in its earliest instances the word concerned both religious and linguistic specificities; the OED provides the following quotations (s.v. *Scotticism*, n., 1):

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> 1648 *Mercurius Censorius* No. 1. 4 It seemes you are resolved to .. entertain those things which .. ye have all this while fought against, the Scotticismes, of the Presbyteriall government and the Covenant.
>
> 1677 *Let.* in G. Hickes *Ravillac Redivivus* (1678) 77 You would make remarks upon my Letters, and faithfully Admonish me of all the Scoticisms, or all the Words, and Phrases that are not current English therein.

However, religious associations soon became less prominent than linguistic evaluations, and throughout the eighteenth century the connotation of the word 'Scotticism' was hardly positive; though Robert Burns commented that "A small sprinkling of Scoticisms, is of no objection to an English reader" (OED, *Scotticism*, s.v., 1 [...] 1793 R. Burns *Let.* Sept. (2003) II), even the leading figures of the Scottish Enlightenment strove to avoid geographically-marked forms in both speech and writing. David Hume is perhaps the most famous case in point: his list of Scotticisms, probably the first of this kind, though apparently meant for private use only (Rogers 1991: 58), appeared in some copies of the 1752 edition of his *Political discourses*, then was reprinted in the *Scots Magazine* in 1760 (Dossena 2005: 65–72), and was imitated when not actually copied in numerous later publications.

Nor was Scotland the only source of stigmatized forms: usage guides attempted to eradicate 'vulgar, provincial, and barbarous' forms found in the usage of Irish, Welsh, Northern and London speakers – see for instance Anon. (1826) – following a tradition that had placed Western, Northern and less than 'courtly' varieties beyond the pale since the days of George Puttenham's *Arte of English poesie* (1589: 120–121).

The origins of specifically-construed varieties overseas thus seem to have their roots in evaluations and categorizations of socio-geographical specificities which were not always devoid of prejudice. Even so, and indeed perhaps because of these attitudes, overseas varieties gradually acquired an identity of their own, occasionally reinforced by views such as Noah Webster's: the element of patriotism seen in the title of *An American dictionary of the English language*, which appeared in 1828 as the expanded edition of *A compendious dictionary of the English language* (1806), stresses the author's interest in the identification of a new, distinctive tongue, again on the basis of ideological tenets.

The contrast between standardization and distinctiveness is also seen in James Boswell: always wary of a strong Scottish accent, he had attended Thomas Sheridan's elocution lectures in Edinburgh, but was also reluctant to accept complete anglicisation. This ambivalent attitude appears in his diaries, where we find references to projected works with a clear linguistic focus; for instance, he wrote 'Proposals for a periodical paper in the Scots dialect' (Pottle, Abbott & Pottle

1993: 106): the paper was to be named *The Sutiman* because "it was the best titil [sic] for a periodical Paper to be published in *Auld Reekie*". Even more importantly, in 1769 Samuel Johnson, by then a famous lexicographer, encouraged Boswell to compile a dictionary of Scotticisms, but the project was never completed, though Boswell had been considering the idea since 1764 – see Dossena (2005: 72–74), and Rennie (2011 and 2012a).

As with John Jamieson, compiler of the first *Etymological dictionary of the Scottish language* (1808), geographical distribution and cultural specificity were seen to be sides of the same coin (see Dossena 2012a and 2012b, and Rennie 2012b). While English was changing as a result of internal processes, for instance in the development of perfect and progressive forms (see, most recently, Aarts, López-Couso & Méndez-Naya 2012), external causes were also leaving a deep mark on the language, especially in its new role on a global scale. The events of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with their dynastic upheavals, their revolutions, their ideology of improvement, colonization and civilization, had a tremendous impact on language use and users both in Britain and overseas: not only did distinctive literary traits begin to be highlighted, also specific linguistic features began to be identified and indeed – in some cases – consistently promoted: the quotations provided by the OED under 'Americanism' show that these distinctive forms had been in use (whether consciously or unconsciously) since the late eighteenth century, and the Revolution and its aftermath actually encouraged the creation of new forms:

> 1795 in D. Ramsay *Hist. Amer. Revol.* (new ed.) I. Advt. from Friend p. v, There are few natives of the United States, who are altogether free from what may be called Americanisms, both in their speech and their writing. [...]
>
> 1936 H. L. Mencken *Amer. Lang.* (ed. 4) i. i. 12 The period from the gathering of the Revolution to the turn of the century was one of immense activity in the concoction and launching of new Americanisms.

Like previously in Britain, also in the US the establishment of an academy was advocated for the systematization and codification of usage (Kretzschmar & Meyer 2012: 139–141), and though this was never established, the perception that 'standard' forms should be identified and promoted has indeed reached our own times – see Hickey (2012). It is this strong connection between Late Modern attitudes and contemporary ones which makes the former so relevant for state-of-the-art investigation. While over the late twentieth century linguists have increasingly appreciated the importance of studying actual usage beyond prescriptive dicta, the general public still finds the appeal of codification particularly strong (see for instance Beal 2009) – a proximity with Late Modern views that makes them resonate very powerfully in contemporary analyses.

Indeed, the turn of the twenty-first century has witnessed a tremendous increase in the scholarly attention paid to Late Modern English (or LModE), especially as far as its codification is concerned: over the last twenty years several volumes, articles and book chapters have appeared on this topic, such as Görlach (1998), Mitchell (2001), and Beal, Nocera & Sturiale (2008); phonology has been discussed in the works of Mugglestone (2003), Beal (2004), Jones (2005); and more encompassing texts have been published by Bailey (1996), Görlach (1999 and 2001), Fitzmaurice (2000), Dossena & Jones (2003), Kytö, Rydén & Smitterberg (2006), Pérez-Guerra et al. (2007), Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2009), and Tieken-Boon van Ostade & van der Wurff (2009). Finally, a sociolinguistic interest emerges in the works by Dossena & Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2008), Pahta et al. (2010), Hickey (2010), and Dossena & Del Lungo Camiciotti (2012). At the same time, scholarly interest has moved beyond the usage of educated informants, such as we see in literary and other printed documents, to encompass the usage of partly-schooled writers, approaching language history 'from below' and shedding new light on a large and previously ignored set of data: see for instance Fairman (2003) and Dossena (2007 and 2008). Nor has this been restricted to English: other languages have been studied in a similar framework (e.g. Vandenbussche & Elspaß 2007 and Elspaß 2012a and 2012b); in the case of Dutch the academic community has even witnessed the rediscovery of an incredibly important bulk of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century documents in the National Archives in Kew (UK): these 'sailing letters', confiscated during the various Anglo-Dutch wars, comprise both private and commercial correspondence from a broad range of writers and recipients, both men and women of varying social classes, thus enabling the launch of an unprecedented research project (see van der Wal, Rutten & Simons 2012; van der Wal & Rutten 2013, and http://brievenalsbuit.inl.nl/zeebrieven/page/about, accessed August 2014).

Interestingly, the two decades in which studies in Late Modern English have expanded have also been the same in which the World Wide Web, invented 25 years ago, has become an ordinary tool of investigation and research. At the time of writing (March 2014), searching for the string "Late Modern English" returns ca. 425,000 hits, while "Early Modern English" returns 412,000: quite few, if we compare "Middle English" (ca. 3,000,000 hits) and "Old English" (5,150,000), but earlier periods in English language history have a much longer scholarly tradition, which is also reflected in the larger number of university courses devoted to them all over the world. On the other hand, the digitization processes undertaken at many libraries and archives has enabled a growing number of manuscripts to become available to students and scholars alike. In addition to educational websites, such as the one compiled by Raymond Hickey at the University of Duisburg-Essen (www.uni-due.de/SHE/), and websites of more general interest, such as George P.

Landow's *Victorian Web* (www.victorianweb.org/), online resources consist of a growing number of materials. Among these, attention to geographical variation is given in the *Corpus of Modern Scottish Writing* (1700–1945, compiled at the University of Glasgow), and the *Corpus of Historical American English* (1810–2009), compiled by Mark Davies at the University of Brigham Young, Utah. These are supplemented by other corpora, not all of which are online yet, such as the *Corpus of Irish English*, also compiled by Raymond Hickey (14th–20th century), the *Corpus of Irish English Correspondence*, which Kevin McCafferty and Carolina P. Amador-Moreno are currently compiling at the Universities of Bergen and Extremadura, and the *Corpus of Early Ontario English* and its pre-Confederation section, both compiled by Stefan Dollinger at the University of British Columbia, to which the *Bank of Canadian English* may be added, also hosted by the same institution.

In addition, a growing number of specialized corpora has been launched: alongside the *Zürich English Newspaper Corpus* (ZEN, 1661–1791) and the *Coruña Corpus of English Scientific Writing*, we now have the *Old Bailey Corpus* (OBC), which provides useful material for the investigation of legal language and of actual usage in depositions; dialect literature and literary dialects form the object of the *Salamanca Corpus*, while at the University of Bergamo a Corpus of Nineteenth-century Scottish Correspondence (19CSC) is in preparation, for which the transcription of both business and familiar letters (including emigrant correspondence) has been undertaken. These corpora supplement those with a more general interest and those with a specific focus on literary materials, such as the *Corpus of Late Modern English Texts*, version 3.0 (CLMET3.0), compiled at the Catholic University of Leuven, the *Corpus of English Dialogues* (CED, 1560–1760), compiled at the University of Uppsala, the *Corpus of Late Modern English Prose*, compiled at the University of Manchester, and of course the well-known, multi-genre *Representative Corpus of Historical Registers* (ARCHER), first constructed by Douglas Biber and Edward Finegan in the 1990s.

Indeed, collections of mostly literary texts have been in the catalogues of important publishers for many years now, but open-access materials are becoming more widespread thanks to the initiatives of specific research groups and institutions, such as the *Charles Darwin Correspondence project* (www.darwinproject.ac.uk/) and the collections of digitized documents in the websites of the British Library, the National Library of Scotland, the Library of Congress, numerous historical societies throughout the USA and Canada, and even crowd-sourcing initiatives aiming to involve the general public and increase interest.[1] New digitized

1. An overview of current initiatives is provided at http://manuscripttranscription.blogspot.it/2011/02/2010-year-of-crowdsourcing.html (accessed March 2014)

resources, and particularly those in which images of original manuscripts are supplemented with accurately proof-read transcriptions, enable scholars to create their own custom-designed corpora for the investigation of specific research questions. As a result, more aspects of Late Modern English may be taken into consideration: among these, early contacts between socio-geographical varieties appear to be an especially worthwhile object of study. In this respect, this collection of essays aims to provide a relevant starting point, focussing on Late Modern English in a transatlantic perspective, i.e. attempting to take an innovative approach to studies of LModE in and beyond Europe, and to shed new light on varieties of LModE outside Britain.

Individual contributions focus on Canadian, American and Southern English, without neglecting the impact of Irish and Scottish forms on these varieties, and discuss both codification and actual usage, not least in contexts where 'language history from below' can be studied. The materials taken into consideration range from dictionaries and usage guides to ego documents, i.e. diaries and correspondence; popular publications, such as emigrant guides and widely-circulating journalism, are also analyzed.

The significant traits of novelty characterizing the contents of individual chapters are supported by the consistently solid methodological approach taken by their authors; these rely mostly on the principles of corpus-based investigation and of historical sociolinguistics and pragmatics, combining quantitative and qualitative analyses in an efficient and convincing way. In addition, the cohesive quality of the studies presented in this collection is ensured by the fact that all the authors discussed early versions of their contributions in a conference at the University of Bergamo in August 2013, the fifth in a series of international events specifically devoted to LModE which has been running since 2001.[2]

The collection is expected to provide a general and consistently valid methodological structure for the study of largely untapped language material from a variety of comparable sources. All the contributors are leading names in their respective fields of expertise, while younger authors belong to well-established research groups. In what follows an outline of contents is offered, in which salient features are highlighted.

1.1 The chapters in this book: An overview

The book opens with an important chapter in which **Laurel Brinton** discusses the significance of state-of-the-art, computerized tools for the advancement of linguistic investigations: her object of study is the adverbial subjunctive in *if*-clauses,

2. Previous events were held in Edinburgh, 2001; Vigo, 2004; Leiden, 2007; and Sheffield, 2010.

occurrences of which are traced in the *Bank of Canadian English* (ca. 2.5 million words from written and spoken sources extending from 1505 to the present). The methodological and theoretical value of the chapter is particularly highlighted in its assessment of the concepts of 'colonial revival' and 'colonial lag': the patterns in the increase and decrease of usage in the first and second half of the nineteenth century respectively seem to suggest that a more widespread use of this form in Canadian and American English as opposed to British English may be due to 'colonial revival', rather than 'lag'. This view thus challenges received ideas of 'conservative' varieties, especially when overseas ones are concerned.

This chapter is followed by another four, in which the codification of English in usage guides and dictionaries, both in Britain and in the US, forms the centre of attention. The first of these chapters, by **Carol Percy**, relies on the libraries of Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826), to analyze the complex relationship existing between political views and linguistic innovation, a topic which – as we saw above – is in line with Noah Webster's own views. In particular, Percy's contribution focuses on lexis and lexicography: Jefferson's own spelling shows his interest in neologisms, the novelty of which appears to be consistent with his republican, anti-federalist political principles. The contribution highlights the link which is often seen to exist between language attitudes and ideology, and which is at the basis of so many evaluations in prescriptive texts.

The next two chapters discuss three usage guides and assess their distinctive traits. First, **Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade** examines the contents and structure of the anonymous *Five hundred mistakes corrected* (1856), one of the earliest American English usage guides. Though its proscriptive approach is consistent with a long tradition of similar books published in Britain throughout Late Modern times, the target audience appears to be different, in that its popularity is linked to the increasing numbers of people who emigrated to America from Europe around the middle of the nineteenth century, instead of socially mobile classes striving to 'improve' their condition within Britain. This difference is inevitably linked to a growing role of English as a lingua franca, meant to favour social integration on the one hand, but also increasingly restricting cultural differences on the other.

Ulrich Busse compares two late nineteenth-century usage guides: one published in Britain (i.e. Henry Alford's *The Queen's English*, of 1864) and the other in the USA (i.e. Richard G. White's *Words and their uses*, of 1871), in order to assess their degree of convergence as far as both contents and ideological approach are concerned. In his study the author shows that, though they focus on similar uses, Alford appears to have a slightly more flexible attitude; White, instead, condemns all innovation, regardless of its geographical origin. What they both have in common, however, is the conviction that language use and morality are closely connected, so that use of 'bad' and 'vulgar' language immediately brands speakers as

lower-class individuals – a feature that had characterized many prescriptive texts, and which would underpin the 'standard language ideology' for many decades.

The relationship between British and American sources is also the object of investigation in the chapter by **Javier Ruano-García, María F. García-Bermejo Giner** and **Pilar Sánchez-García**, who compare John R. Bartlett's *Dictionary of Americanisms* (1848) and Joseph Wright's *English dialect dictionary* (1898–1905), in order to assess the indebtedness of the latter to the former. Starting from a quantitative analysis aiming to determine the proportion of terms taken from Bartlett's work, the authors compare these findings with those concerning other American sources used in Wright's dictionary and discuss how Wright dealt with them in terms of usage labels, comments, citations and *ad-hoc* examples.

The next three chapters approach texts in the light of historical pragmatic studies, thus moving from the codification of varieties to investigations of language in use. In the first of these chapters **Marina Dossena** examines the expression of point of view, description and evaluation in nineteenth-century narrations of ocean crossings; relying on materials collected for 19CSC, CMSW, and two published essays, i.e. Robert Louis Stevenson's *The amateur emigrant* (1895) and Edmondo De Amicis's *Sull'oceano* (1889), the study highlights the main linguistic strategies employed by authors of varying levels of education for the expression of subjective evaluation and the elicitation of reader involvement. The interlinguistic perspective granted by the availability of comparable texts in English and in Italian (Stevenson's and De Amicis's) also enables an overview of the main features employed in popular essays.

In the next chapter reader involvement is similarly discussed by **Francisco Alonso-Almeida** and **Nila Vázquez** in their study of legitimizing linguistic devices in *A cheering voice from Upper Canada* (Colborne 1834), a text meant to promote emigration from Britain to Canada, and thus meant to sound credible, reliable, and persuasive. The authors focus on all those strategies leading to defence, support or justification of point of view; their findings show that – as we may expect – deontic modality indexes authoritative voice, while epistemic and internal/external participant modality have a persuasive function. In this way contrasting patterns seen in Canadian and European social practices are favourably highlighted in an attempt to encourage emigration, in line with the author's agenda.

Politeness moves, and indeed impoliteness strategies, are then discussed by **Matylda Włodarczyk**, who analyzes a corpus of letters sent by the Colonial Office to Mr William Parker, a Cape of Good Hope emigration scheme candidate (1819). The aim is to assess the possibility of filtering intentional and strategic linguistic choices from the politic and highly conventionalised language of correspondence. The letters addressed to Parker are compared with a larger set of data

from the Colonial Office spanning the years 1819–1823, and findings also show the usefulness of current corpus tools for the identification of pragmatic uses. In the case in point the author employs USAS, a semantic tagger devised at the University of Lancaster (see http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/usas/).

The book closes with two chapters in which pragmatic analyses intersect with syntax and morphology. The first, by **Carolina P. Amador-Moreno** and **Kevin McCafferty**, discusses Irish English discourse marker *sure* and its relationship with similar uses in American English on the basis of instances found in the *Corpus of Irish English*, which consists of literary texts, and the *Corpus of Irish English Correspondence*, which contains Irish emigrant letters. This comparison enables an investigation of the structural positions in which *sure* is found from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, and of the different pragmatic functions it seems to fulfil: in this respect the authors suggest that the discourse marker may have indexed both identity and intimacy, eliciting consensus and mitigating opinions.

Finally, **Trinidad Guzmán-González** analyzes patterns of gender assignment in a corpus of nineteenth-century letters exchanged among settlers in the American Great Plains. Starting from general perspectives on usage of third-person singular pronouns in anaphora in sex-sensitive collocations and a discussion of methodological issues, the author then focuses on usage of the feminine pronoun as an indicator of colloquial American English, and of the neuter pronoun as a possibly patterned choice for nouns like *baby* or *child*.

The consistently homogenous approaches to theory and methodology followed in individual chapters enable them to interact fruitfully with one another, as the attention given to texts in a generally sociolinguistic perspective guarantees their comparability. The documents analyzed in individual chapters are either newly available materials, or materials the linguistic features of which are discussed for the first time in this book. This trait of novelty is expected to be of interest for both younger and more experienced scholars: it is with this hope that the book is offered as a starting point for further investigations.

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