

Busse, Ulrich & Hübler, Axel (2012)
Investigations into the Meta-Communicative Lexicon of English

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292 PÁGS.

This book studies Historical Metapragmatics, which according to Busse & Hübler, has not received enough attention up to now. Thus, they highlight the importance of metacommunicative expressions covering a big period of time in relation with the history of English language. The book is divided into an introduction, three parts, a name index and a subject index. Part 1 contains seven papers; part 2, four papers; and part 3, one paper. Each of these three parts has its own introduction and is followed by its own references. The introduction offers a summary of each paper in the book and describes its general purpose, namely to contribute to Historical Metapragmatics a collection of papers from different authors presented in an International Conference in Jena, Germany 2008. These papers have in common their focus on metacommunicative expressions, i.e. on lexis. In general, the three parts of the book follow a thematic division, although chapters within each part are arranged chronologically. Thus, this division of the book creates an unbalanced number of papers in the different parts: with the first one having seven papers, while the third one having just one. The authors justify this difference by stating that “the clear preponderance for genre-related studies may reflect simply a personal preference or a general trend” (Busse and Hübler 2012: 9).

The aim of Part 1, “Metacommunicative profiles of communicative genre”, which is divided into cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, is to give the reader an overview of the vocabulary people used throughout different centuries. The cross-sectional study comprises two papers: “Sociability: Conversation and the performance of friendship in early eighteenth-century letters” by Susana Fitzmaurice and “I write you these few lines: Metacommunication and pragmatics in nineteenth-century Scottish emigrants’ letters” by Marina Dossena. Although both papers use letters as the basis for their analysis, their object of study is different. The former focuses on two words with very different meanings nowadays, according to the author, *conversation* and *friendship*, analysing their use in the letters from the 18th-century gentlemen and using a subcorpus from the *Network of Eighteenth-century English Texts* (NEET). What is interesting in this paper is the analysis that the author carries out about how *conversation* and *friendship* acquire different meanings in formal letters influenced by the pragmatic context. This study has the particularity of presenting real extracts from formal letters to support Fitzmaurice’s assertions about the use of the aforementioned terms. In general, this paper is of interest to general readers, as it approaches the study of the terms *conversation* and *friendship* showing how different their

meaning were from their actual use. The only *but* to this paper is the use of foreign terms without any translation which may be confusing at times.

The latter studies the metacommunicative vocabulary of informal letters written by emigrants with different levels of schooling in the 19th century, using a sample from the *Corpus of 19th century Scottish Correspondence*. Dossena explains that these letters use different pragmatic strategies which aim to maintain the standards of formality and to convey emigrants' thoughts as authentically as possible. The author carries out a descriptive study on the letters of the emigrants showing the ways in which these emigrants shared information, memories, etc. because these texts had a metacommunicative and pragmatic function. To clarify these uses of metacommunicative vocabulary, Dossena shows four tables with the frequency of personal pronouns, and vocabulary about the letter itself, the writing activity and the exchange of information. Despite the great synthesis of the conclusion, the paper lacks a proposal for a new research approach. All in all, this paper could be interesting for scholars who want to deepen their knowledge of the metacommunicative processes, but for general readers could be more difficult to grasp because as it involves some basic knowledge of the pragmatic and metacommunicative functions as a way of sharing information.

The rest of Part 1 consists of five longitudinal studies. The first paper by Watts, "Inscribed orality and the end of a discourse archive: Metapragmatic and metadiscursive expressions in the *Peterborough Chronicle*", uses the *Peterborough Chronicle* as the corpus for its analysis. The aim of this paper is "to show how metapragmatic and metadiscursive expressions may be used as evidence to argue for significant changes in dominant discourse archives during the history of the English language" (Watts 2012: 67). Thus, the author analyses the use of metapragmatic and metadiscursive expressions in written discourse according to *the uniformitarian principle*, which allows the reader to recognise elements of orality and informality in written texts (i.e. the inscribed orality). in the 11th to 12th century. His paper contains a figure showing the degrees of mediacy and formality in written and oral text genres to illustrate his concept of inscribed orality (those features belonging to the written medium), as in these centuries there was no evidence of oral interaction. Furthermore, he provides some examples of metapragmatic expressions (Watts 2012: 68), some taken from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles¹, written in Old English, and followed by their translation. It is surprising that Watts's paper does have not a conclusion; instead the author uses the disappearance of the ASC to conclude it. The author's analysis can be of interest for researchers investigating on diachronic changes in language discourse and discourse changes, who seek to widen their knowledge of the concept of inscribed orality and how to analyze it.

¹ From now onwards ASC.

The second paper by Gotti, “Managing disputes with civility: On seventeenth-century argumentative discourse”, studies the development of specialized discourse in the 17th century which increased its accuracy and power of expression due to the new scientific discoveries. The author makes an overview of Boyle’s model in “*The Sceptical Chemist*” to finally offer his own account of what specialized discourse should be like. Thus, Gotti analyzes this evolution by providing the reader with the rules created by the members of the Royal Society. Most of his quotes are taken from Robert Boyle and his “*The Sceptical Chemist*” because the author considers that Boyle played a key role in the promotion of the discourse change. Throughout the text Gotti describes Boyle’s rules and explains that with them scientists wanted to spread the information and make the text more comprehensible. The paper is arranged according to the rules that the author wants to point out. Accordingly, part 2 describes the civility in scientific discourse and how Boyle considers it; part 3 deals with linguistic clarity, i.e. the accurate language that scientists must use to avoid any ambiguities; part 4 approaches accuracy in reporting facts and expressing opinions; and parts 5 and 6 consider author’s objectivity when writing their texts; and the explicitness of the argumentative structure, respectively. Scholars may find this paper interesting, insofar as it describes how Boyle provided the scientific community with the rules which changed this type of texts.

Verschueren’s paper, “The metapragmatic of civilized belligerence”, analyzes the evolution of the metapragmatic lexicon adopted in laws in times of war using the *General Collection of the LAWS AND CUSTOMS OF WAR on Land, on Sea, under Sea in the Air, according to the treaties elaborated by the International Conferences since 1856*. The author claims that textbooks presuppose the existence of implicit codes of conduct in times of war, but that they do not explicitly mention the laws or agreements they refer to. Although the author only analyses part of the aforementioned book, he presents the development of international and humanitarian laws related with the Indian Munity where these laws acquire force. What he specifically analyses is the explicit metapragmatic framing in the text, quoting many examples throughout the paper (Verschueren 2012: 125). As the author himself recognizes in part 2, this paper is the continuation of an earlier work. As a consequence, it is meant to be for scholars specialized in this very specific subject matter who are preferably familiar with the work of the author.

The fourth paper by Heyd, “The metapragmatics of hoaxing: Tracking a genre label from Edgar Allan Poe to Web 2.0”, analyzes hoaxing providing a diachronic overview from its earliest references in the late 18th century to its most recent forms on the websites. The author first defines hoaxes as deceptive utterances occurring in one-to-many speech situations and containing a false proposition (Heyd 2012: 131). Furthermore, she considers hoaxes as addressed to a multiple audience with the aim of being funny rather than fraudulent. This paper is divided into two parts: the first one deals with the

etymology of hoax, whereas the second one describes the variation and change in the metapragmatics of the hoax. The etymology of this term is supported by some quotes and examples showing us that the meaning of the actual term is similar to the original one. Even though the use photographs of the web sites can be redundant because it does not clarify anything about the link or the examples she talks about, the structure and content of the paper make it of much interest for scholars and students involved in the study of metapragmatics.

The last paper in this section, written by Bublit, is called “From speaker and hearer to chatter, blogger and user: The changing metacommunicative lexicon in computer-mediated communication”. Its aim is to analyse the appearance of new terms with the arrival of the computer-mediated communication² and the change they have caused in metacommunication. The author distinguishes between non-mediated communication (whose participants still are speaker-hearer) and mediated communication (whose participants are speaker-hearer, chatter, blogger, or user-user in Web 2.0). He studies the different degrees of interactivity: either a one-way communication (such as hyperfiction, gamebooks, encyclopedias, dictionaries and travel guides and printed or broadcasted texts and films) or a two-way communication (such as face-to-face, telephony, instant messaging, social networking sites, letters, email or SMS). This paper may be interesting for expert researchers and scholars in this field, since it shows not only the evolution of the metacommunicative terms but also our cultural evolution as speakers- hearers as a result of the new forms of communication.

Part 2, which focuses on the “Metacommunicative lexical sets”, contains four papers. The aim of this part is to give the reader an overview about the lexical sets and their development. The first paper, “Now as a text deictic feature in Late Medieval and Early Modern English medical writing” by Taaitsainen and Hiltunen, studies the case of *now* using three different corpora: *The Helsinki Corpus*, *Middle English Medical Texts* and *Early Modern English Medical Texts*. The authors focus on the personal and impersonal uses of *now* in written communication, specifically on the medical prose from the late Medieval and Early Modern periods, where *now* is often used to guide the reader through the text. The second part of this paper called Research questions, outlines its aim, while parts 3 to 5 consider the textual organization, the materials and the method of study of the aforementioned corpora. Part 6 is subdivided according to each corpus that the authors have analysed. Thus, *now* is independently analyzed in each chosen text or source in which it appears and supported by some of the more than 1.700 examples taken from the corpora. Finally, part 7 is about how *now* functions in meta-texts as a discourse structuring device. The authors conduct

² From now onwards CMC.

a qualitative analysis of concordance lines extracted from the three corpora, which can be very interesting for researchers who want to pursue this research line.

The second paper by Kohnen is called “Performative and non-performative uses of speech-act verbs in the history of English”. Its aim, in the author’s own words, is “to give an initial account of the factors which may contribute to the performative use of (directive) speech-act verbs” (Kohnen 2012: 220) with examples taken from the *Dictionary of Old English (DOE)*, *Corpus of Old English* and *British National Corpus*. Kohnen suggests four determining factors for the performative use of directive verbs: frequency, specificity of verb sense, speech-act conventions, and genre requirements. He makes a specific analysis about these four factors supported by two figures, showing the frequency of the different types of verbs in directive performatives in Old English. The paper division is clear explaining all the factors that the author has taken into consideration separately. As the examples are taken from Old English, they are translated into current English to help non-expert readers understand the topic. The specificity of the paper makes it of much interest for scholars investigating in this subject matter.

The third paper by Simon-Vandenberg and Defour, “Verbs of answering revisited: a corpus based study of their pragmatic development”, focuses on the verbs in English that allow the speaker to react to a prior turn and their frequency, namely rejoining, replying, retorting and responding. This paper has two very differentiated parts: a first theoretical part, in which, the authors establish the aims, the corpus and the methodology used in their paper; and a second applied part, illustrating the way in which each of the aforementioned verbs were or are used. A qualitative (studying the meaning of the verbs) and quantitative (analysing the frequency) analysis is carried out with these verbs. They conclude these verbs differ from each other and hence, their frequency is not the same (with rejoining and retorting being still infrequent -which is the reason why they are dealt with together, unlike replying responding and answering), acquiring new senses in new contexts. This paper allows scholars to have a pragmatic perspective on these verbs, being thus of much interest.

The last paper of this part, “A lexical approach to paralinguistic communication of the past” by Hübler, has the aim to “outline the scope and development of metacommunicative expressions depicting paralinguistic communicative behaviour” (Hübler 2012: 247). In addition, Hübler presents and explains three notions: alternants (which he calls *voice figures*), interjections and lexicalization. He considers alternants those figures which only exist in the spoken mode but which occasionally acquire a written form. Interjections are, according to the author, those voice figures which acquired transcribed forms, though not all voices figures get codified as interjections. Finally, lexicalizations are defined as those few voices figures usually lexicalized as verbs or nouns. This paper is a descriptive text about how and why

the most productive phase of lexicalization was the 16th to the 17th centuries. They conclude that this phenomenon was determined by a cultural-political context. The paper has three charts to show the amount of lexicalized interjections and an appendix to clearly display the data. Thus, it is a specific text for scholars interested in the topic.

Finally, Part 3 has only one paper written by Alexander Brock, “Historical evidence of communicative maxims”. Throughout the paper, the author defines “language change as a possibility maxim-driven phenomenon” (Brock 2012: 272). Therefore, he uses different formulations of maxims or pragmatic principles, such as Grice’s maxims, Sperber and Wilson’s principle of relevance or Levinson’s heuristics. Regarding these three theories, the author mentions that his aim is not “to support or refute a particular formulation of maxims or pragmatic principles”, but to base his argumentation on these different models. We are in front of a very specialized text where the author does not offer a solid conclusion, because, as he advises, this paper is just an approach and many questions remain still unanswered, as, for instance, whether the abstract maxims really change or only their manifestation in discourse and text patterns change. As a result, the paper can be interesting for researchers who want to further investigate this research line.

In conclusion, this book gives an overview of historical pragmatics through a wide variety of papers with different topics that have in common the metacommunicative lexicon. For a general reader, it could be difficult to understand because of the level of specificity given in most of the papers and the wide variety of topics approached in the book. Even a specialized reader or scholar could only find a few of them interesting due to their high specialization.

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