
Book Review

Jonathan Culpeper and Merja Kytö. *Early Modern English dialogues. Spoken Interaction as Writing*. [Studies in English Language Series] Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010. ISBN 978-0-521-83541-1 hardback

by Gabriella Mazzon

This book represents a major step in the development of methodologies for the analysis of pragmatic effects in historical texts. It combines insight from corpus linguistics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and historical linguistics, to formulate a new model for dialogue studies and, more generally, for the study of linguistic elements loaded with pragmatic value that appear in written texts from the past. This deep and thorough study starts from the construction of the *Corpus of English Dialogues 1560-1760 (CED)*; a list of the texts included is given in an Appendix), undertaken by the authors as part of the general development of historical corpora in the last fifteen years. However, the book is also highly innovative, in that it not only reviews previous research and contributes new evidence, but introduces new approaches and new insight.

The first element of innovation is already present in the Introduction, where the authors tackle, in a deep and systematic way, the question that looms over most studies in historical pragmatics, i.e. that of the relationship between the written text and ‘orality’. The representation of speech in writing is of high interest to the historical linguist, since it can (at least indirectly) testify to the existence, spread and use of specific forms. But it is of even higher interest to the historical pragmatician, since it represents the employment of authorial conventions that serve as shorthand to indicate possibly valid conversational conventions at the time of writing. The authors distinguish between speech-like genres (e.g. personal correspondence), speech-based genres (e.g. trial proceedings), and speech-purposed genres (e.g. drama). This represents a considerable refinement from previous models, which have often considered ‘speech-related’ genres as a group of text-types in contrast with ‘written’ genres proper; the present classification enables the authors to establish a more fine-tuned framework for the empirical studies in the ensuing chapters.

In Chapter 2, the genres included in the *CED* are illustrated, highlighting the fact that particular care was taken in the codification of the context of dialogue and of the relations between interlocutors, all elements which, the authors claim, have so far been dealt with in a rather *ad hoc* fashion; this kind of analysis, systematically carried out throughout a sample covering two centuries, uncovers the multiplicity and the degree of variation in these factors. This leads, in turn, to a classification of the types of speech-related features found in different texts and of the different discourse levels present in the texts themselves (Chapter 3); each dialogic exchange happens not only at the

discourse level of the represented participants (e.g. the characters in a play), but also at other levels, in which the characters level (or that of the people involved in a trial deposition, or of the student-teacher dyad in a didactic dialogue) are embedded. In trial proceedings, for instance, we must consider the participants also in their situational roles, then the court recorders and officials writing and reading the texts, and finally the editors and the ‘ultimate addressees’, e.g. the judges or the king. Adding remarks on the degree of transcription accuracy that can be expected, Culpeper and Kytö conclude that all speech-like features in written texts are to be taken as having authorial value (in the wider, not necessarily literary sense), and therefore have pragmatic meaning on a different plane from that of the (intra-textual) speaker. This is specified in Chapter 4, with an outline of the structure of face-to-face interaction in speech and writing, a kind of performance grammar which draws on functional grammar approaches, based on the assumption of a shared context. This and some of the following chapters show that it is still fruitful to rely on the idea of ‘macro-functions’ of the Halliday type, sometimes more so than on a notion of ‘illocution’, which may apparently look more fine-grained, as in most classifications of speech acts, but is thereby also more liable to be overly rigid and to lead to mechanistic and over-rational models of pragmatics.

In the ensuing chapters, the authors use evidence from the *CED* in relation to various aspects typical of speech-related texts; far from being a mere quantitative analysis, or an application of previously developed notions, this part of the book is an opportunity for a critical revision of some key concepts in pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and discourse analysis, followed by clear methodological sections on how the various notions and hypotheses were tested using the corpus. The first such notion is that of lexical bundles (or specific word combinations), whose rates of recurrence account for different rates of formulaicity in different genres (Chapter 5). Another interesting speech-related feature is lexical repetition (Chapter 6), which is inserted in texts, though rarely, with a pragmatic function as an authorial device, since written texts show no record of hesitation or turn-holding repetition. Word repetition (predominantly single-word repetition in the sample) can signal either agreement or disagreement, acceptance or refusal.

Repetition is a signal of textual cohesion, and in the following chapter the authors address another marker of cohesion, i.e. the conjunction *and*, which appears to have also pragmatic, and not only syntactic, linking functions. As an all-purpose coordinator, *and* seems to be decreasing in frequency along time in the *CED*, besides being more frequent as clause coordinator than as phrase coordinator. After this analysis, the authors move on to other items that represent innovations in Early Modern English, i.e. neuter possessive *its*, pro-form *one*, and auxiliary *do*. The intention here is to prove that these new forms, shown to be speech-related innovations by previous studies, correlate variously with different genres in the *CED*. Although this is an interesting contribution and addition to established lines of research, the chapter appears less integrated than others in the general framework of the book.

Chapters 9 to 12, conversely, present the organic and systematic development of the analysis of elements dubbed by the authors as ‘pragmatic noise’. This convenient label, which only partly overlaps with the traditional category of interjections, includes items that are considered markers of ‘spokenness and interaction’. Therefore, the notion also involves the category of discourse/pragmatic markers (the authors argue that these should not be confused but kept distinct), which have recently become the object of more systematic attention from studies in historical pragmatics. The presence of these items in texts such as plays is again, according to Culpeper and Kytö, a marker of authorial

intervention, a tool to convey characters' attitudes and emotions, for instance; this is related specifically to the textuality of such works, particularly for readers (as opposed to play-viewers), who do not have the benefit of intonation cues in the interpretation of the text. The authors review the most frequent items employed with this purpose in Early Modern English plays, from *Alas* to *Fie* to *Ho*, whose functions they connect both to the conventions of ancient rhetoric (very influential in Renaissance England) and to the Halliday model of macro-functions presented in the first part of the book. The authors notice an increase in the use of pragmatic noise in the seventeenth century; this is interpreted as being a possible reflex of the general drift towards 'oral styles' claimed, for many textual genres, in the last two hundred years. At the same time, the decline in the recourse to rhetoric and to sentimentalism brings to a decrease in these items in the very last period considered, i.e. the eighteenth century. The elements of pragmatic noise are also analysed in relation to their contextualised functions and in their co-occurrence with other elements; this group of chapters, although drawing useful comparisons with previous studies on interjections, is particularly innovative not only in establishing the comprehensive notion of pragmatic noise, but also because it investigates the relevant items under several points of view and therefore aims at constructing a more complete picture of the way in which they are employed in texts.

The next two chapters, 13 and 14, are devoted to developing deeper insight into the sociolinguistics of the *CED* texts by drawing detailed profiles of the participants in the interactions represented in the texts of a specifically tagged sub-corpus, the *Sociopragmatic Corpus (SPC)*. This is in itself an innovation, since corpus tagging normally includes less contextual information of this kind (e.g. information on the respective social status of the participants), and since it is especially difficult, in corpus studies, to take specific dyads or participant pairs into account, with the exception of studies concentrating on address forms, where of course the respective identities of speaker and addressee have always been more salient. Culpeper and Kytö concentrate particularly, in these and in the following chapters, on gender issues, and on the elements of the immediately preceding co-text that can influence power relations within interaction. Chapter 14 is particularly interesting since it highlights the inequalities in the distribution of talk between participants of different status and gender, especially when it comes to more formal and public talk, e.g. in trial proceedings.

Chapter 15 is devoted to pragmatic markers, i.e. elements that are markers of interactivity but also have the function of mediating not only between participants, but also between utterances (for instance in the case of hedges, which often increase the fuzziness of a preceding utterance); in this sense, it is important to distinguish between discourse markers (which increase the coherence of the text) and pragmatic markers proper (which are related to the interpersonal function in the utterance). Furthermore, the items that the authors review in this chapter are not, or not only, those traditionally considered within the category of markers: along with *well* and *I think* we find *about*, *very* (as an intensifier) and *a little*. The incidence of pragmatic markers is analysed against the genre distinctions and social classifications in the corpus, with a focus on non-interrogative *why* as a case study. The results in this chapter further show authorial manipulation, in that markers are conspicuously present in plays, where they contribute to convey the attitudes of characters, but relatively rare in trial proceedings, where such markers are liable to being ironed out by transcribers.

In the final chapter, the authors recap their results, pointing to the evidence for different degrees of employment of speech-like features in different speech-related

genres; they rightly stress the methodological innovativeness of their approach, as well as the potential it shows for future research. Of course, this potential can best emerge in the study of periods for which there is abundant evidence of the various speech-related genres, such as Early Modern English, and when one can rely on a systematically constructed and tagged corpus, such as the *CED* and especially the *SPC*. This book marks a new development in dialogue studies and in historical pragmatics in general, and can certainly be recognized as a highly authoritative contribution for future research.

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