Nicholas Brownlees (University of Florence, Italy)

Reporting the news in English and Italian personal newsletters

In this paper I shall examine linguistic and rhetorical features in newsletters sent by English and Italian diplomats and politicians to their respective correspondents at the turn of the eighteenth century. The English newsletters will comprise correspondence sent from both within and outside Britain whilst the Italian correspondence consists of newsletters sent to the court of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany from the Grand Duchy’s diplomatic representative or ‘agente’ in London.

In the analysis of English and Italian newsletters I shall examine and compare epistolary openings, thematic progression, personal evaluation comments, narrative and reporting discourse schemata, and closing formulae. Although my initial study of English and Italian newsletters suggests differences in the language of openings and closing formulae, there would appear to be similarities in relation to thematic progression as well as narrative and reporting discourse schemata. These differences and similarities will be analysed in the paper as will the presence or otherwise of personal evaluation, with the overall aim of determining how far Italian and English personal newsletters converge in their use and exploitation of linguistic and rhetorical features.

However, in assessing the form and communicative impact of the newsletter, extralinguistic details will also be taken into consideration. For example, as the newsletter was often just one component of the sender’s weekly post bag to his addressee, one needs to consider whether the other documents in the weekly despatch provide additional insights into the newsletter itself. For example, what communicative significance lies behind the different handwriting employed by the same Italian ‘agente’ in the two kinds of newsletter that he sent back to the Medici court? Is there significance in the fact that in those newsletters addressed to his personal correspondent the hand is much less ornate than in those newsletters where there is no specific addressee and which conform to the more impersonal narration of news found most typically in Italian ‘avvisi’?

The paper will also address methodological issues relating to the comparison of historical newsletters originating from diverse linguistic and cultural communities. In the discussion of such methodological considerations, I shall refer to Nevalainen (2002), Brownlees (2008) and studies presented in Dossena / Fitzmaurice (2006) and Dossena / Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2008).

References


Eleonora Chiavetta (University of Palermo, Italy)

Fanny to William: A Critical Discourse Analysis Approach to the Letters of Frances Leonora Macleay

The aim of this paper is to apply the CDA approach developed by Norman Fairclough (1992, 2001, 2003) to the correspondence of Frances Leonora Macleay (1793-1836) with her brother William. A watercolour painter, naturalist and philanthropic worker, Frances Leonora (Fanny) Macleay (1793-1836) was born in England, but moved to New South Wales in 1826, when her father served as colonial secretary in Sydney. She grew up in scientific circles and was influenced by the scientific interests of both her father, a fellow of the Royal and Linnean societies, and her brother William, a well-known naturalist.

Frances’s letters to William span twenty-four years of the early nineteenth century. They begin in 1812, when William was an undergraduate at Cambridge, cover the period when William was working in Paris and Fanny was in London, assisting her father with his renowned insect collection, and finally, were sent from Sydney to Cuba, where William was, from 1826 until Fanny’s death in 1836. Although William’s letters to Fanny have not survived, it is still possible to deduce their content from Fanny’s intertextual references to them. Thus, the letters shed some light on a sister/brother relationship, in an English middle class family of the period. Moreover, as a large proportion of Fanny’s Antipodean letters has survived, they provide an interesting, but of course subjective, account of life in the colony.

The CDA approach will be applied to Fanny’s letters to investigate issues of her identity and of her agency within her family. In particular, the letters will be analysed to find out how she positions herself within the scientific circles the men of her family belonged to, and within the colony’s social life. As Fairclough’s three dimensional model will be used, the analysis will take into consideration the text (i.e. text structure, speech acts, intertextuality, coherence, etc), the social practice, and the discursive practices. In the area of social practice, the domains of science, social status and gender will be mainly focused.

References

Gabriella Del Lungo Camicotti (University of Florence, Italy)

An atypical commercial correspondence: negotiating artefacts and status

The culture of epistolary has recently received much attention and this has focused on epistolary communities beyond the domestic or intimate context, that is, groups of people who used handwritten texts to foster a shared set of values, religious, political or other (Schneider 2005). Another interesting strand is represented by the investigation of the nature of the epistolary exchange bonding two or more parties. Of course, the main aim of letters is the transmission of news among correspondents; however, letters are also material evidence of social connectedness and as such they straddle the divide between private and public communication.

The paper will investigate how artefacts and identities are textually constructed in the unpublished nineteenth-century correspondence between the Director of the National Gallery, London, Sir Frederic Burton (1816-1900) and the painter, collector and dealer Charles Fairfax Murray (1849-1919). The correspondence, conserved in the National Gallery Archive and the Harry Ransom Research Center in Texas, comprises 128 letters, dating between 1867 and 1900. Sixteen of these are from Murray to Burton, the rest (except for one note from his secretary) from Burton to Murray. Murray was resident in Italy for much of this period, and the correspondence largely concerns the purchase of paintings he made there either for the Gallery as unofficial agent for the Director, or for the Gallery as dealer. It is thus a commercial correspondence of a rather special kind, between two artists of unequal social standing, one representing one
of the major cultural institutions of Victorian Britain and answerable directly to Parliament and the nation, the other an outsider and émigré eager to place his outstanding connoisseur’s eye and business acumen at the service of such an institution, not only out of national pride but also and above all out of a passionate interest in the historical study of art. The analysis of this corpus will shed light on how artefacts can be identified in textual space; in addition, it will afford evidence of the negotiation of social identity and status within an atypical commercial context as well as in a non-commercial context.

The analysis of the correspondence will be based on the formal notions of collocation (Stubbs 2001) and semantic sequences (Hunston 2008), with a view to isolating patterns of use which through their repetition/concordancing and/or topic relevance signal typical descriptive/evaluative functions. It will thus be possible to shed light on the development of practices used to achieve the specific aims of the discursive community of art dealers and to textually construct identities both in the private and the public sphere; moreover, it will be possible to provide information about contemporary ways of perceiving identities of artefacts and people.

References


Marina Dossena (University of Bergamo, Italy)

The study of correspondence: theoretical and methodological issues

The study of correspondence is an ideal field in which to ask significant research questions, not only on the internal history of the language, its socio-historical varieties, and its relationship with prescriptive or proscriptive trends in linguistic commentary, but also on what tools are in fact available to answer the former research questions. Huge numbers of letters, notes, circulars and memos are held in private collections or stored in libraries and archives throughout the UK, but scholars seem to have only just begun to scratch the surface of this extraordinary mine of manuscript or typescript sources.

In recent years corpora have been compiled on the correspondence of specific authors (see for instance Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2005 and Fitzmaurice 2008), sampling collections from edited or unedited texts (see <www.helsinki.fi/varieng/domains/CEEC.html> and Kytö *et al*. 2006), or actually transcribing authentic manuscripts from a range of sources (see Dossena 2004). All such enterprises are valid in their quest for reliable data, and it is important to stress their unifying traits. This contribution thus aims to discuss some significant problems facing linguists who intend to study Late Modern English correspondence, such as the quantity and quality of data available for investigation, issues in transcription and in corpus compilation and publication/distribution. Considerations will be based on the work carried out so far for the compilation of the Corpus of Nineteenth-century Scottish Correspondence (19CSC – see Dury 2006 and Dury 2008), in an attempt to assess experience and outline more encompassing methodological principles for future research. Special attention will be given to the application of such principles to the study of pragmatic moves in business and familiar correspondence.

References


Stephan Elspaß (University of Augsburg, Germany)

**Narratives between linguistic creativity and formulaic restriction.**

**Cross-linguistic perspectives on 19th century lower class writers’ letters**

The present paper is concerned with the correspondence of non-professional writers in the 19th century. I will mainly look at private letters written by emigrants from the lower and lower-middle ranks of the society. These writers wrote letters to bring information across, make appeals, or just ‘chat’ with relatives and friends. In order to communicate successfully, they had to be linguistically ‘creative’, i.e. make flexible use of a variety which they would normally not use in everyday speech, and at the same time follow certain conventions of letter writing. It has been demonstrated, e.g. in Elspaß (1999) and Dossena (2007), that even barely schooled writers relied heavily on textual routines and formulaic patterns from model letters and other text sources. Taking ‘creative’ and ‘formulaic’ language as sometimes conflicting, sometimes complementing basic constituents of letter writing, I will try to reconstruct the writing process non-professional writers in the 19th century underwent when they put pen to paper. Most of the letters I will use for my analysis are written in German. Examples from English and Dutch letters will be drawn on for the purpose of cross-linguistic comparison.

**References**


Tony Fairman (independent scholar, UK)

**Official and personal letters by mechanically-schooled writers, England 1795-1835: differences and similarities.**

Nowadays people write in different styles. They can do this because everyone for the past 100 years or so has been schooled in compositional writing, that is, they have been taught how to create different styles of text. For example, children in present-day English primary schools are taught 21 ‘forms’ of writing (‘National Curriculum’ 2007). But 200 years ago there were different schools for different social classes, and schools for the lower classes didn’t teach compositional writing. I have assembled a corpus of 1600+ letters, which people in the English lower classes wrote between 1795 and 1835. All letters contain applications for relief, and all, except 40, are addressed, in accordance with English laws for the previous 200 years, to parish overseers. The letters are, therefore, on official business. The 40 exceptions were sent between family members by 38 writers. Of these 40, 13 are between spouses (10 by husbands), 13 are from children to parents (7 evidently from sons, 2 from daughters), 9 are between siblings (7 from brothers) and the remainder are between indeterminable family members. Since these letters contain references to distress, the recipients must have given them to overseers, so that they are now in overseers’ files. We can assume that, because all these writers belonged to the lower classes, they had been schooled only in mechanical writing, that is, they had learnt only to form graphs in several different hands and to copy texts from different sources. This paper considers two questions: 1) did mechanically-schooled writers change their style for letters to family and to overseers? 2) is the language of their official letters the same as that by writers...
schooled in compositional writing? The letters will be examined for orthography, lexis, grammar, syntax and layout.

References

Lea Laitinen / Taru Nordlund (University of Helsinki, Finland)

Orality, literacy and self-taught writers in 19th-century Finland

This paper aims to discuss letter writing in 19th-century Finland, especially from the viewpoint of the continuum of literacy and orality. Methodologically, the letters of self-taught writers are especially interesting in this respect. Furthermore, they tell us about the identities of the common people as writing members of Finnish-speaking society in 19th-century Finland. In Finland, self-educated writers appeared during the same century as the standard Finnish language and literature were constructed, and the Finnish nation was built on these. The focus of our paper is: did the self-taught writers identify themselves with the growing idea of nation or rather with the local community they lived in?

We will approach this question by using material written by both lower-class writers and writers from the educated classes with a vernacular background. We also plan to discuss 19th-century emigrants’ letters from America to Finland (and vice versa) to find out how the linguistic identity of lower-class writers was built outside Finland in the Finnish-speaking community.

References

Rita Marquilhas (University of Lisbon, Portugal)

A historical digital archive of Portuguese letters

Documents from the letter genre, and private letters above all, are the best possible data for studying everyday men and women in society, their linguistic knowledge and behavior, as well as their social inscription. Although they are written matter, letters are very close to the informal tenor of spoken utterances. They are frail “light” papers, containing temporary messages, so they seldom reach the printed dignity (publishers only invest on letters by writers, intellectuals or politicians). Kept either in private hands or in archives that filed them for accidental reasons, they are absent in that kind of massive linguistic corpora where researchers test their hypotheses. But this state-of-affairs can change if investment is made in projects like the one presented here: a digital archive of Portuguese private correspondence, which has a four-century time span (from the 16th to the 19th centuries) and aims to meet the following needs:

1. The need for massive sets of informal, close-to-spoken sources, felt by historical linguists when trying to understand the mechanisms of language change – better than making ‘the best possible use of bad data’ in the diachronic research (as in Labov’s famous expression) is to make sure you have rather ‘good data’ right from the beginning.
2. The need for naturally occurring first-person testimonies felt by sociologists when trying to be empirical about the understanding of social life phenomena.
3. The need for using philological expertise with non-literary texts as well as with non-institutional ones. The established practice of putting textual criticism to the service only of prestige-invested texts and
authors is a way of maintaining the exclusive preservation of canonical high culture – and its standard language – in the history of written communication. Until today, whoever wants, for a number of reasons, to study the culture of anonymous people in history seldom finds reliable editions to work with.

And in fact, private letters kept in archives can be extremely informative on different topics occupying the core of research within the fields of linguistics, anthropology and sociology. An incomplete list of those topics includes:

i) historical linguistic phenomena and language change theory;
ii) inter-personal modes of relation;
iii) socially or psychologically pressing factors shaping individual behavior;
iv) the invasion of informal written discourse by rhetoric conventions and vice-versa;
v) pragmatic solutions in the written discourse of semi-illiterate people when trying to convey meaning;
vi) popular beliefs in the power of written technology.

Kevin McCafferty (University of Bergen, Norway) / Carolina P. Amador Moreno (University of Extremadura, Spain)

‘I will be expecting a letter from you before this reaches you’. Studying the evolution of a new-dialect using a Corpus of Irish English Correspondence (CORIECOR)

Studies of pre-twentieth-century Irish English (IrE) remain rare, few take a long-term historical perspective, and their empirical basis is limited. The Corpus of Irish English Correspondence (CORIECOR) is being developed as a diachronic corpus for tracing the emergence and development of features of IrE, including stylistic, regional, and social variation. CORIECOR currently has good coverage of the period 1740-1940.

For historical comparison with relevant British input varieties and other colonial Englishes, data from CORIECOR may be used in conjunction with similar corpora of English English and Scots/Scottish English, as well as North American and Australian Englishes. Such comparisons may address questions of the origins and spread of features of both the standard language and regional vernacular Englishes from Britain into Ireland, and from there to the Americas and the southern hemisphere (and even back to Britain), so that CORIECOR may contribute to the study of global English.

We analyse two features subject to recent or ongoing change: increasing use of progressive aspect, and replacement of first-person shall by will. Both phenomena are said to show distinctive patterns in IrE – partly exemplified in our title – and are claimed to have diffused from Ireland to North America, then back across the Atlantic into British English. However, neither has received much attention in work on IrE, and there are no diachronic studies of either. Our work shows the progressive taking off early in IrE (in the late eighteenth century) and its use spreading more rapidly than in other varieties. Like other colonial Englishes, however, shall is robust in eighteenth-century IrE, where it is used by people of higher social status and in formal contexts, but is rapidly replaced by will in the nineteenth century. Our results suggest that, while the rise of the progressive may be partly due to IrE influence, the spread of first-person will might have a wider base in regional varieties of British English.

Robert McColl Millar (University of Aberdeen, Scotland)

The problem of reading dialect in semiliterate letters: the correspondence of the Holden Family, 1812-16

In 1812, Thomas Holden (or Holding) of Bolton, Lancashire, was sentenced to transportation to New South Wales, Australia, for machine smashing (his family were handloom weavers). For the next four years, almost all of Thomas’ letters, both from England and Australia, and a considerable selection of correspondence from his family, have survived; they are now in the possession of the Lancashire County Records Office.

The correspondence both to and from Thomas is undoubtedly semi-literate, although probably closer to the literate end of that continuum. It would be expected, therefore, that considerable infiltration of local dialect forms would be found in the letters. But while there is some evidence for certain non-standard features (the lack of /h/ being regularly realised, for instance), this is less ‘rich’ than we might expect,
particularly when we compare it to the language of working class characters as represented in novels from the same and slightly later periods.

What, then, caused the Holden family to write what is essentially a form of written Standard English when their writing suggests that they have not had large-scale exposure to that or any written variety? Can this paradox be explained by religious or social background?

Linda Mitchell (San Jose State University, USA)

Reinforcing Grammar and Composition Skills through Letter-Writing Instruction in Late Modern England

Letter-writing instruction grew in importance as a learning tool in the late modern period because of its practical application to real-life situations. The vernacular had become the language of the educated, and the rising middle classes needed literacy skills to prepare for their vocations. The British Empire was growing and changing. Industrial centers were forming and trade to foreign ports increased, both of which demanded language competency. Letter writing reinforced grammar and composition skills in order for students to be successful. This study will investigate how schoolmasters used letter-writing assignments to improve literacy, teach grammar rules, and develop writing strategies.

In the introductions to their texts, these late modern pedagogues argue that when students combine real-life tasks with academic skills, they learn more than from rote exercises. For instance, in English Examples to be Turned into Latin (1685) Edward Leedes uses devices like colorful names, witty narratives, and didactic lessons in examples of correspondence. He writes in the preface that he has “ventured to put odd and unusual names upon those that write, as well as those that are wrote to” to keep a student on task. Leedes explains point of view, appropriate language, and meanings of words. By writing letters to a specific person, students also master composition skills, e.g., addressing audience, presenting a topic coherently, and writing with appropriate tone and voice. Charles Gildon accomplishes this goal in Grammar of the English Tongue (1723) as he guides the student through “an easie and genteel way of conveying our Mind in the shortest and most expressive” language (193). Writing letters also provides a context in which students can apply rules and correct their mistakes. Charles Johnson’s The Complete Art of Writing Letters (1779) includes a grammar to help the writer compose more effective letters. The connection between grammar and writing letters is made even more explicit in James Wallace and Charles Townshend’s Every Man His Own Letter-Writing: or, the New and Complete Art of Letter-Writing Made Plain and Familiar to Every Capacity [1782?]. They state, “A careful attention to the plain and simple rules laid down in the preceding grammar, will enable the learner to write in the language of the present times; and, if he carefully avoids affections, his thoughts will be clear, his sentiments judicious, and his language plain, easy, sensible, and suited to the nature of the subject.” John Hill’s popular The Young Secretary’s Guide or, a Speedy Help to Learning spans both centuries with advice on “Style and Dialect” and a promise of “Accurate Spelling” and “Elegant Phrases.”

Thus, grammarians responded to the needs of middle-class students by combining learning with real-life skills. Letter writing reinforced correct usage in both grammar and writing, while also preparing students for a vocation.

Terttu Nevalainen (University of Helsinki, Finland)

Using personal correspondence as evidence for ongoing acrolectal changes in Late Modern English

One of the problems historical sociolinguists are confronted with is finding systematic evidence for language change in progress. Since field work is ruled out for earlier periods, written data sources have to be relied on to provide a sufficiently diversified picture of real-time language variation and change in the speech communities of the past. Using individual letter writers as the sampling unit, the Corpus of Early English Correspondence (CEEC) has been compiled to serve this purpose – within the limits imposed on the research agenda by the varying levels of full literary over time.

Studies on the Late Middle and Early Modern English sections of the CEEC (c. 1410-1680) have provided plenty of evidence to build confidence in the method of using personal letters as an adequate data source for detecting ongoing processes of language change. Nevalainen/Raumolin-Brunberg (2003)
investigated the social contexts of fourteen processes of change using the CEEC as their primary data, and demonstrated the relevance of regional, gender, social status and register differences to the diffusion of these processes. Those features that supralocalized became part of the mainstream varieties of English, and thus contributed to the rise of, to borrow a neutral term from creole studies, a focused *acrolect* in contrast to the base dialects of the language at the time.

Many but by no means all the changes discussed in Nevalainen/Raumolin-Brunberg (2003) were completed by 1680. My paper examines some of those that were not by analysing the material provided by CEECE, the 18th-century Extension of the CEEC. The features investigated include linguistic variables such as the third-person singular *has* vs. *hath* and the *not … neither vs. not … either* constructions. I will discuss both the baseline evidence the corpus provides for them, and the specific contexts in which the recessive variants are found to persist in the data.

These morphosyntactic changes form part of a more comprehensive project by the members of CEEC team which aims to chart processes of change in Late Modern English using personal letters as primary data. The letter writers’ social and regional backgrounds and the pressure that normative grammar may have exerted on these processes are taken into account. If directly relevant, this latter source of influence is expected to be reflected in the time courses of the processes undergoing change. The results will be compared with those obtained for the Lowth Corpus by Tieken-Boon van Ostade (2005).

References

Gigliola Sacerdoti Mariani (University of Florence, Italy)
*The correspondence of “the strawberries-man”*

“God bless you, dearest; and may you feel my kiss all along the journey”
“Do not, by your silence, desert me”
“I feel that far or near, you are and shall be my good angel”
“Here the sky, the lake, the country around, are very beautiful, but I long to feel sad in England”
“Bless you, my evening star. I am always with you: it is my only, often sad, dear support and consolation in this dreary discouraged life of mine”
“This is a homoeopathic note, but love is in the inverse proportion. Love to the wings”
“Bless you. Give a kiss for the strawberries-man to Maude and Adah”

No one can read even the briefest and most occasional writing of Giuseppe Mazzini without gaining some impression of the simple grandeur of the man, the lofty elevation of his moral tone, his unwavering faith in the living God, but the language of his letters to a group of English friends, dated 1849-1870, provides the most valuable insights into his ideological/political beliefs. I mean to say that, although much is known of the life of the “Spirit of the Risorgimento”, the epistles sent to Clementia Doughty Taylor, Harriet Hamilton King, Jessie White Mario, Eliza Ashurst, Emilie Ashurst Venturi, Caroline Ashurst Stansfeld and Matilda Ashurst Biggs are an unconscious autobiography or an epistolary novel, giving a very precise picture of the social network which he belonged to and which he politically affected.

My research aims to identify the textual construction of Mazzini’s role – his own *persona*, the “prophet in exile” - as disclosed by his linguistic and rhetorical strategies that are related to a variety of socio-historical conditions of production and to a wide range of events - the failure of the Roman Republic (1849), the expedition of the Thousand Red Shirts (1860), the proclamation of the Kingdom of Italy (1861), the unification of the Italian peninsula with the “addition” of Venetia (1866) and Rome (1870).

I shall start from Mazzini’s epistolary salutations/closing formulae, quoted above, and from one of his metatextual statements (“a letter is strength, consolation, love – and, if very good, joy”) that signal his social and psychological proximity to the recipients, and I shall focus on the discursive devices he uses in this huge corpus of letters in order to find the frame that would make his truths visible to others, translate his overwhelming sense of what was right into effective arguments, and negotiate solidarity towards the Italian liberation cause.
Letters as loot: confiscated letters filling major gaps in the history of Dutch

The National Archives (Kew, UK) keep a treasure that causes real excitement among scholars: the recently rediscovered collection of Dutch documents from the second half of the 17th to the early 19th centuries, comprising over 38,000, both commercial and private, letters. These so-called “sailing letters” were confiscated during the wars fought between The Netherlands and England. Though mere booty for privateers as well as for the British High Court of Admiralty at the time, they nowadays represent priceless material for historical linguists of the 21st century.

What makes this huge collection of letters so interesting for linguists are the private letters, written by men, women and even children of all social ranks, including the lower and middle classes. They offer an unprecedented opportunity to gain access to the everyday and colloquial language of the past and will consequently enable us to get a view on the Dutch language history from below.

In my paper I will go into the socio-historical linguistic approach of my research programme Letters as loot. Towards a non-standard view on the history of Dutch which started 1 September 2008 at Leiden University. I will show the results achieved so far and discuss the perspectives offered by this extraordinary and highly valuable source of sailing letters. Our research is expected to lead to a thorough revision of the traditional views of 17th- and 18th-century Dutch, which are largely based on analyses of published, mostly literary texts produced by professional – male – writers belonging to the higher social classes from the province of Holland. By looking at the sailing letters from the perspective of the language history from below we will be able to complement current accounts of the history of Dutch from a non-standard view and fill major gaps in our linguistic knowledge of the past. Thus nowadays the confiscated sailing letters offer amazing perspectives that previously linguists could only have dreamt of.