

TOWARDS A SPEECH ACT ANNOTATION SCHEME FOR 18TH-CENTURY SCOTTISH LETTERS

To date, little emphasis has been placed on researching the realisation of speech acts in historical regional varieties of English. Studies have shown, though, that e.g. early modern Scottish and English letter-writers manifest variation regarding their preferred speech act realisation strategies (Elweiler forthcoming a, forthcoming b). In order to facilitate historical cross-varietal speech act analyses, I plan to develop a speech act annotation scheme for 18th century Scottish, Irish and English letters. This paper presents a pilot project which aims to lay the groundwork for the development of this speech act annotation scheme by focussing on ca. 50 18th-century Scottish letters from *ScotsCorr*.

Speech acts are not used in isolation in letters, but occur in speech act sequences, so-called macro-speech acts (van Dijk 1980: 184), as the following example illustrates:

I have so great a pen. in my head that I cannot wet on you this day. m^r allexander mcCloud hes. that peper. I was speking to you. of: & he hes promised. to give you a sight of it to morrowmorning. so both of you. will be plesed. to advice. uhat is proper to be don.

(Anne Mackenzie, 1700)

The letter-writer first apologises for not being able to wait for the addressee due to a headache and offers to make amends for this. This apology then serves as a grounder for the following request to consult with McCloud on how to proceed. Macro-speech acts may in turn be grouped into global speech acts, resulting in a hierarchical organisation of speech act sequences in an interactive scheme (Félix-Brasdefer 2014: 342–343). The goal of this pilot project is to devise and test an annotation scheme reflecting this hierarchical organisation. My talk will present an outline of the project and discuss, in particular, the selection of criteria for the categorisation of speech act sequences based on the preliminary analysis of a small range of letters.

References

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ScotsCorr = *The Helsinki Corpus of Scottish Correspondence 1540–1750*. 2017. Ed. Anneli Meurman-Solin. Helsinki: Research Unit for the Study of Variation, Contacts and Change in English (VARIENG), Department of Modern Languages, University of Helsinki. <<http://urn.fi/urn:nbn:fi:lb-201411071>>.